

**30-SECOND
ANCIENT
EGYPT**

The greatest Egyptian
civilization ever created in history.
How did it happen?



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30-SECOND ANCIENT EGYPT

The 50 most important
achievements of a timeless
civilization, each explained
in half a minute



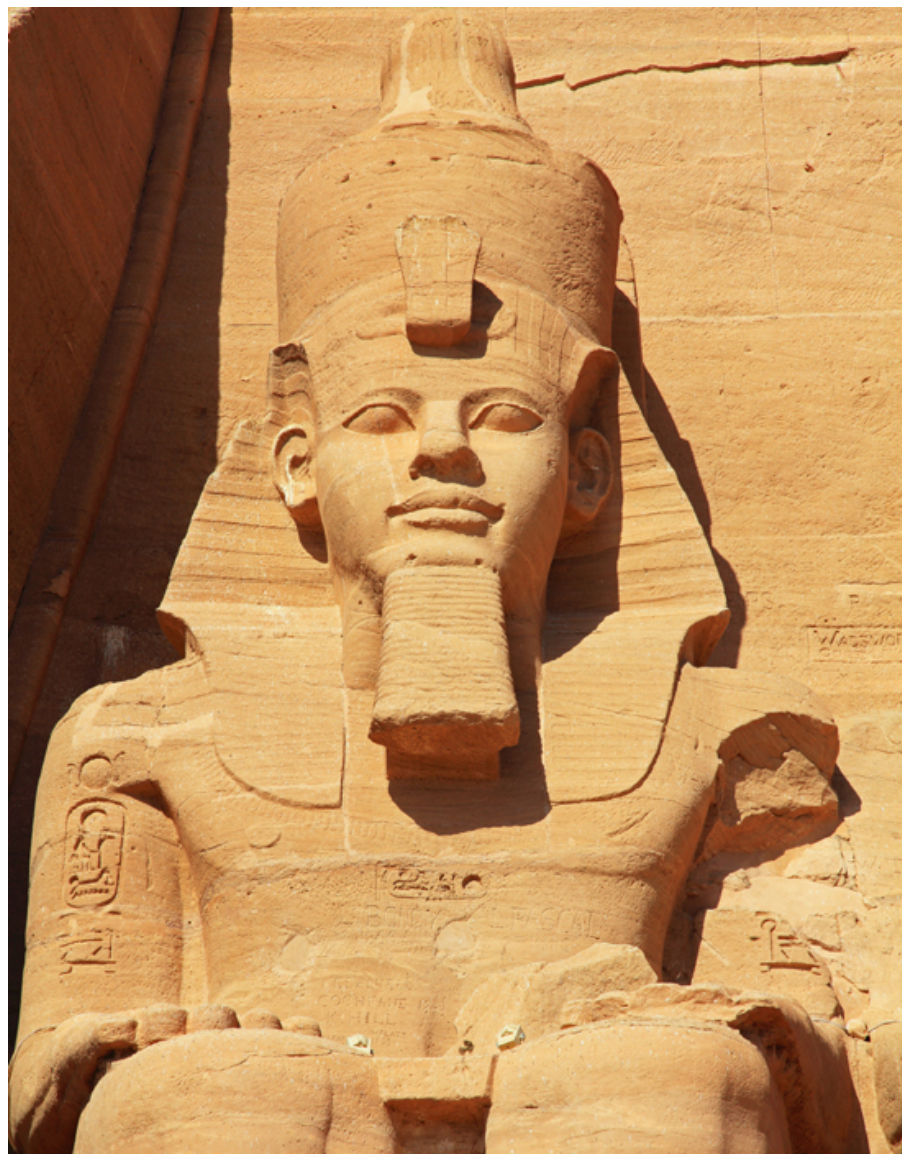
Editor
Peter Der Manuelian

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We've all heard of pyramids, hieroglyphs and Cleopatra, but how much do you really know about ancient Egypt? Why was the Nile integral to the unification of Egypt? What is the mystery surrounding Queen Hetepheres' tomb? What did the Amarna Letters reveal? What did the ancient Egyptians eat and drink?

30-Second Ancient Egypt presents a unique insight into one of the most brilliant and beguiling civilizations, where technological innovations and architectural wonders emerge among mysterious gods and burial rites. Each entry is summarized in just 30 seconds – using nothing more than two pages, 300 words and a single picture. From royal dynasties and Tutankhamun's tomb, to hieroglyphs and mummification, interspersed with biographies of Egypt's most intriguing rulers, this is the quickest path to understanding the 50 key ideas and innovations that developed and defined one of the world's great civilizations.

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INTRODUCTION

Peter Der Manuelian

Pyramids, mummies, King Tut, Cleopatra, and of course the mysterious “code” of Egyptian hieroglyphs. These are the icons embedded in Western popular culture, the first to spring to mind when the topic of ancient Egypt arises. And why not? Try to find another civilization with the megalomania to match the pyramids of 4,500 years ago. Or one that has found such an impressive way to conquer death and decay magically by preserving the human form over millennia. Has any archaeological discovery topped the 1922 find of Tutankhamun’s tomb in the Valley of the Kings? The multitalented Cleopatra, who navigated treacherous political waters and won the love of two Roman leaders, never ceases to fascinate us. And finally, the Egyptians’ use of birds, objects, and striding human figures to represent verbs, nouns, and adjectives—the building blocks of a full-fledged grammatical language—surely comprises one of the most intriguing examples of art as writing, and writing as art.



Bust of Nefertiti

The elegant bust of Nefertiti, wife of the pharaoh Akhenaten, is one of the most iconic sculptures of ancient Egypt ([see here](#)).

But ancient Egypt, and the scholarly discipline of Egyptology, have so much more to offer beyond the headline icons listed above. The questions we explore are as endless as they are fascinating. How did the Nile Valley become home to one of the most sophisticated and durable complex societies in human history? Where did this pharaonic state, with its all-important concept of kingship, and a labyrinthine administration that would bring a smile to any modern bureaucrat's lips, come from? Why did illiterate peasants in distant villages—who would never see the pharaoh or the capital—buy in to the system? What role did the geography and climate play in defining Egypt's relationship with her neighbors to the south, west, and northeast? How did the writing system evolve, from tags and simple identifiers to didactic treatises on social behavior, philosophical musings on the nature of existence, biographical inscriptions, mortuary spells, gynecological texts, and court

trial records of captured tomb robbers? What drove a nation to construct a temple complex that is larger than the Vatican, each king striving to outshine his predecessor with pylons, columned halls, and sacred spaces? When and why did the Egyptians create their unique blend of frontal and profile perspectives, combining the best of all vantage points and leading to an art style that is instantly recognizable, from Horus and Hapi to Heston and Hollywood? These are just a few of the many topics that you will find in this book, summarized and described in accessible overviews by distinguished Egyptologists from around the world. As we learn ever more about ancient life along the Nile, today the field of Egyptology includes methodologies from anthropology, archaeology, history, biology philology, linguistics, geology, statistics, art history, digital humanities, and social studies, to name just a few.



The Pyramids of Giza

These colossal structures are testament to the technological brilliance of the ancient Egyptians. The pyramid on the right—the Great Pyramid of Giza—is the only surviving Wonder of the Ancient World ([see here](#)).

Chapter and Verse

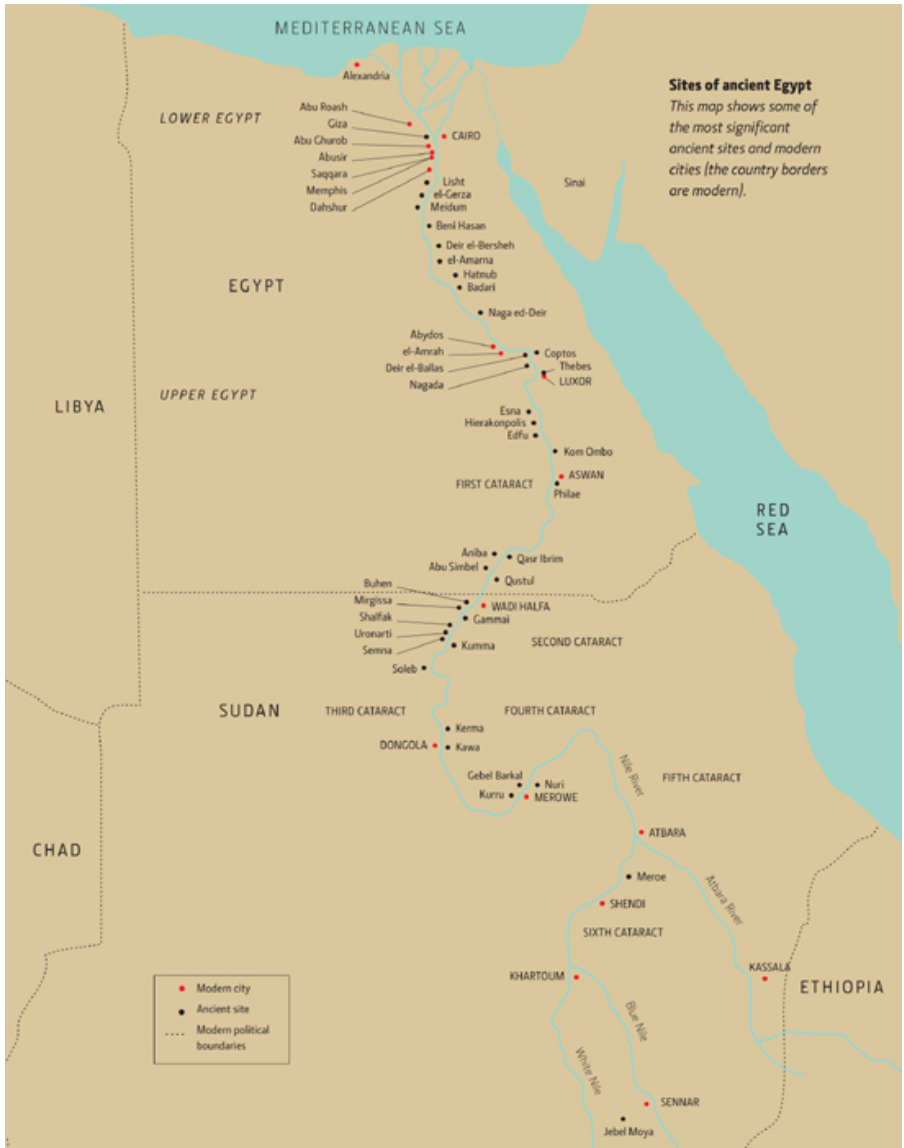
Modern approaches to ancient Egyptian civilization tend to divide elements of the culture into categories that the ancients would not have recognized. For example, we might distinguish between magic and science, between church and state, but the Egyptians wove such concepts into a seamless world view. Nevertheless, this book presents seven chapters, each full of information on such specific themes. We begin with Land & People, covering the Nile, surrounding landscape and peoples,

kingship and the succession of royal dynasties. We then move into Architecture & Sites, summarizing the various forms of Egyptian construction, and highlighting some of the most important sites and structures. Because the history of Egyptian archaeology is as fascinating as the finds themselves, our next chapter covers some of the Great Discoveries, including hidden mummies of pharaohs we never expected to meet in person, golden treasures, artistic masterpieces, an international correspondence archive, a mysterious royal tomb, and thousands of statues from a single temple pit. From here, we shift the focus to many aspects of Egyptian society, professional life, and thought. Science, Medicine & Technology takes us into the realm of the technicians, while Thought & Belief reveals Egyptian religion and the mortuary realm. Sculpture, painting, and the world of letters are the subject of Art & Culture, while our final chapter looks at Life & Society, from family roles and relations to food preparation and bureaucratic administration. Sprinkled throughout the chapters are special two-page “biographies” that illuminate the lives and careers of some of ancient Egypt’s most intriguing individuals.



Pottery vessels

The ancient Egyptians excelled at many crafts, producing fine ceramics and pottery for everyday use as well as for ceremonial purposes.



Sites of ancient Egypt

This map shows some of the most significant ancient sites and modern cities (the country borders are modern).

How to use this book

Throughout the volume, you will find each subject contained on a single left-hand page, with selected imagery on the right-hand page. The main entry, the 30-second history, provides the most in-depth treatment of the topic. In the margin at left, the

3-second survey encapsulates the topic in a single sentence and, farther below, the 3-minute excavation elaborates on the theme, with additional evidence, or a sidebar anecdote or specific example. To the right, Related histories cross-reference to other topics in the book, while 3-second biographies list relevant individuals, ancient or modern, with significant connections to the theme under discussion. There is a Resources section at the back of the book providing some excellent suggestions for further reading, as well as a number of Egyptological web sites on a wide variety of topics. Taken together, the volume aims to provide glimpses into the rich cultural legacy of the ancient Egyptians, while presenting the equally remarkable development of the field of Egyptology.



Mask of Tutankhamun

*One of the greatest archaeological discoveries from ancient Egypt was the tomb of Tutankhamun
(see [here](#)).*

CHRONOLOGY

Only a small selection of ancient Egypt's rulers is listed here. All dates are approximate until 664 BCE.

PREDYNASTIC PERIOD 4500–3100 BCE

Dynasty 0 **3100–2960**

Narmer 2960

EARLY DYNASTIC PERIOD 2960–2649 BCE

Dynasty 1 **2960–2770**

Djer 2926–2880

Djet 2880–2873

Den 2873–2859

Dynasty 2 **2750–2649**

Khasekhemwy 2676–2649

OLD KINGDOM 2649–2100 BCE

Dynasty 3 **2649–2575**

Djoser 2630–2611

Dynasty 4 **2575–2465**

Snefru 2575–2551

Khufu 2551–2528

Khafre 2520–2494

Menkaure 2490–2472

Dynasty 5 **2465–2323**

Isesi 2381–2353

Unas 2353–2323

Dynasty 6 **2323–2150**

Teti 2323–2291

Pepy II 2246–2152

Dynasty 7(?) **2150–2143 (?)**

Dynasty 8 **2143–2100**

FIRST INTERMEDIATE PERIOD 2100–2040 BCE

Dynasties 9 & 10 **2100–2040**

Dynasty 11 (first part) **2140–2040**

Mentuhotep II (pre-unification) 2061–2040

MIDDLE KINGDOM 2040–1640 BCE

Dynasty 11 (second part) **2040–1991**

Mentuhotep II (post-unification) 2040–2010

Dynasty 12 **1991–1783**

Senwosret I 1971–1926

Senwosret III 1878–1841

Dynasty 13 **1783–1640**

SECOND INTERMEDIATE PERIOD 1640–1550 BCE

Dynasty 14 Several kings, perhaps contemporary with Dynasty 13 or 15

Dynasty 15 (Greater Hyksos) & Dynasty 16 (Lesser Hyksos) 1640–1540

Dynasty 17 1640–1550

NEW KINGDOM 1550–1070 BCE

Dynasty 18 1550–1295

Ahmose 1550–1525

Amenhotep I 1525–1504

Thutmose I 1504–1492

Thutmose II 1492–1479

Thutmose III 1479–1425

Hatshepsut 1473–1458

Amenhotep II 1427–1400

Thutmose IV 1400–1390

Amenhotep III 1390–1352

Amenhotep IV (Akhenaten) 1352–1336

Tutankhamun 1336–1327

Ay 1327–1323

Horemheb 1323–1295

Dynasty 19 1295–1186

Seti I 1294–1279

Ramesses II 1279–1213

Merneptah 1213–1203

Dynasty 20 1186–1070

Ramesses III–XI 1184–1070

THIRD INTERMEDIATE PERIOD 1070–712 BCE

Dynasty 21 1070–945

Dynasty 22 945–712

Shoshenq I 945–924

Osorkon II 874–850

Dynasty 23 818–700

Dynasty 24 724–712

LATE PERIOD 760–332 BCE

Dynasty 25 760–660

Piye 743–712

Dynasty 26 664–525

Psamtik I 664–610

Dynasty 27 525–404

Dynasty 28 522–399

Dynasty 29 399–380

Achoris 393–380

Dynasty 30 380–332

Nectanebo II 360–343

GRAECO–ROMAN PERIOD 332 BCE–364 CE

Macedonian Dynasty **332–305**

Alexander the Great 332–323

Ptolemaic Dynasty **305–30**

Ptolemy I–XV 305–30

Cleopatra VII 51–30

ROMAN PERIOD 30 BCE–364 CE

BYZANTINE PERIOD 364–476 CE



LAND & PEOPLE

LAND & PEOPLE

GLOSSARY

Amun One of the most important gods worshipped in ancient Egypt from an early date. Amun was commonly represented as a human figure wearing a kilt and a double-feathered crown. His name meant “the hidden one,” referring to the many aspects of his personality.

Asiatic A Near Easterner. The term used to denote a foreigner or enemy of ancient Egypt from the region of Syria-Palestine.

cartouche A hieroglyph in the shape of an encircling loop representing a length of rope folded and tied at one end that framed the royal names of Egyptian pharaohs. Its first attestation was in the Fourth Dynasty, during the reign of Snefru (2575–2551 BCE). The loop signified the infinite and was related to solar symbolism and the encircling protection of the sun.

delta The fertile crescent at the mouth of the Nile River, which was the northern extent of Egypt.

deshret An ancient Egyptian term meaning the “Red Land,” referring to the desert regions on either side of the Nile River. It was also the formal name for the Red Crown of Lower Egypt.

dynasty A sequence of rulers that share a common origin, usually of the same family.

Hyksos In Egyptian, the term means “ruler(s) of foreign countries.” The Hyksos were a group of people from Western Asia who ruled northern Egypt during the Second Intermediate Period. The Hyksos are credited with the introduction of new military technology into Egypt, such as the composite bow and horse-drawn chariot.

inundation The yearly flooding of the Nile River, which left behind nutrient-rich silt and moisture ripe for harvest. The season of the Inundation (Akhret) marked the beginning of the ancient Egyptians’ year.

kemet The ancient Egyptian term for the fertile Nile River basin area, the “Black Land.”

Kush An ancient Nubian kingdom located south of the Second Cataract in modern day Sudan. It was the seat of the rulers of the 25th Dynasty.

Late Period (ca. 760–332 BCE; Dynasty 25–2nd Persian Period) The last time native Egyptians ruled Egypt. It was the last great flowering of Egyptian civilization.

Lower Egypt A geopolitical term for the northernmost region of ancient Egypt comprising the Nile Delta. Its ancient name was Ta-mehu (“land of papyrus”). The cobra goddess, Wadjet, was its patron deity. Lower Egypt was represented by the Red Crown, and its symbols were the papyrus and the bee.

maat The ancient Egyptian concept for truth, justice, and cosmic order that was also personified as a goddess represented as a female wearing a tall feather on her head, or by the feather alone. It was the king’s duty to uphold maat for the entire country, so much so that the value and legitimization of the king’s reign depended upon how well he maintained maat.

Middle Kingdom (2040–ca. 1640 BCE; Dynasties 11–13) A period of political unity when art, architecture, literature, and religion flourished. During this time, ordinary individuals gained access to funerary privileges once only accessed by royals, and a middle class arose.

New Kingdom (1550–1070 BCE; Dynasties 18–20). The age of the Egyptian Empire. The period is marked by extensive building projects and military campaigns.

Nubia A region extending from southern Egypt to northern Sudan. Egypt sought to exploit quantities of gold from this region, as well as to import incense, ebony, ivory, exotic animals, and dwarfs through trade.

Old Kingdom (2649–ca. 2100 BCE; Dynasties 3–8) A period of economic prosperity and political stability that also marked the beginning of large state-organized building projects, such as the Step Pyramid at Saqqara and the Great Pyramid of Giza.

pharaoh The title for the ruler of ancient Egypt, the king.

Upper Egypt The southernmost region of ancient Egypt extending from Aswan to south of Cairo. Its ancient name was Ta-Shemau (“land of reeds”). The vulture goddess, Nekhbet, was the patron deity of this region. Upper Egypt was represented by the White Crown and its symbols were the flowering lotus and the sedge.

THE NILE

the 30-second history

Placid and serene, or foaming and formidable, the Nile was the ancient Egyptians' lifeline superhighway for everything: food, transportation, communication, irrigation, and state control. As powerful as the river appears to us today, it is but a thin trickle compared to some of its ancient ancestors. The Nile we know dates to about 12,000 years ago. Flowing from south to north through almost 4,200 miles (6,760 km) and nearly a dozen countries, the world's longest river was the magnet that drew migrating proto-Egyptians to its banks, as the surrounding climate changed from moist to arid. Six cataracts (rapids) rendered navigation treacherous from Egypt's southern border south into ancient Nubia. Meandering northward to the Delta, the Nile once split into seven branches, but just two remain today. Rains from the Ethiopian highlands caused annual inundation (blocked by dams since the 1960s), starting in June, which deposited rich alluvial soil across the floodplain. This life-giving event could turn deadly in either direction: famine from a low inundation, or flooding and destruction from a high one. Nevertheless, the Egyptians revered the inundation, and personified it in the form of a rotund fertility deity with pendulous breasts named Hapi.

3-SECOND SURVEY

With annual inundations and a host of life- and society-supporting capabilities, the Nile made the unified Egyptian state possible.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Is there any book on ancient Egypt that fails to quote the fifth-century BCE historian Herodotus' apt remark that "Egypt is the gift of the Nile"? Far be it from this publication to break ranks. Which item contributed more to the construction of the Egyptian society—the Pyramids or the Nile? Over the longer term, the river always wins.

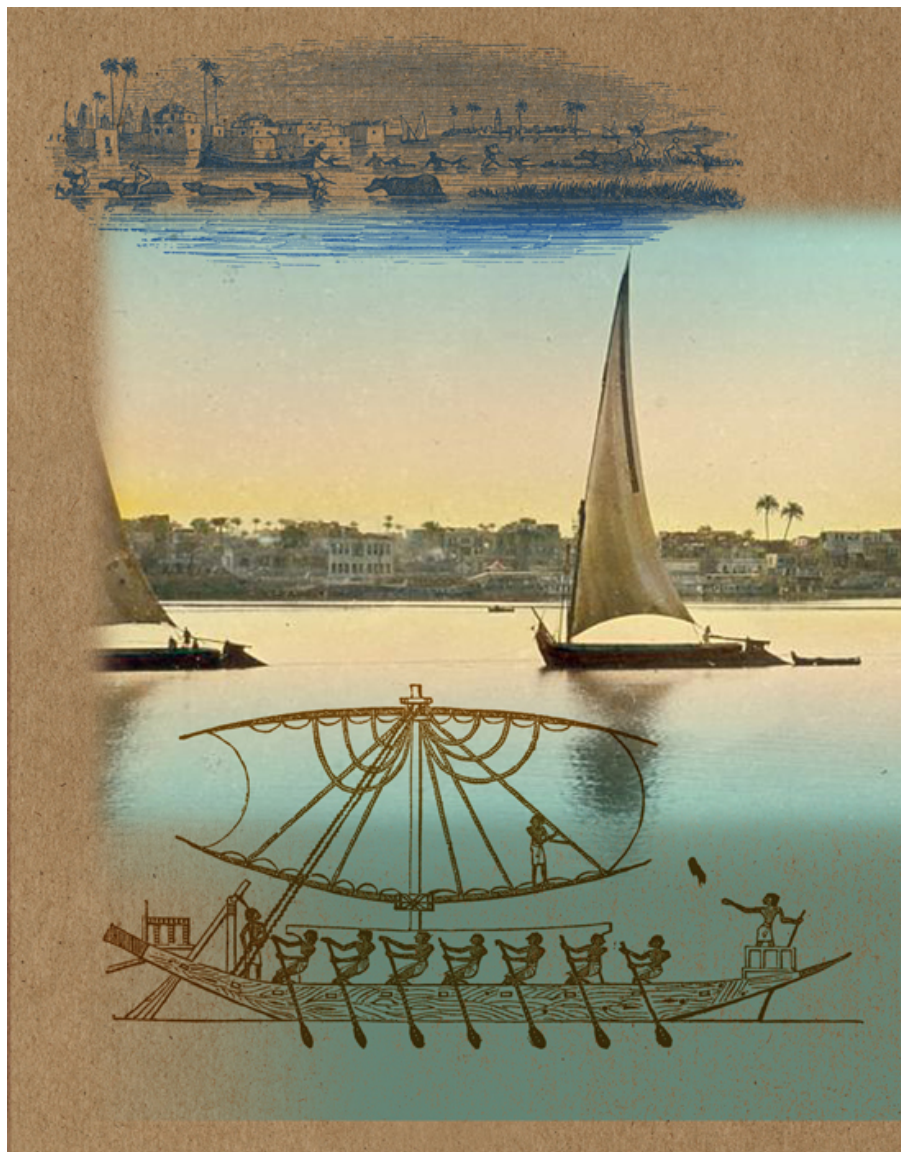
RELATED HISTORIES

ETHNICITY & POPULATION

SETTLEMENTS

30-SECOND TEXT

Peter Der Manuelian



*Celebrated in the “Hymn to the **N**ile,” the river was fundamental for food, transport, communication, and state control.*

THE DESERT & THE OASES

the 30-second history

Desert occupied most of ancient Egypt. The Egyptians thus saw a landscape divided between desert (deshret, “Red Land”) and the Nile Valley and Delta (kemet, “Black Land”). The Western Desert (i.e. eastern Sahara) was roughly twice the size of the Eastern (i.e. Arabian) Desert. While arable, settled land was familiar, ordered, and “controllable,” the desert presented inhospitable terrain with dangerous wildlife and marauding nomads. An exception was desert land flanking the valley, where proper burial was a persistent ideal for reaching the “Beautiful West” of the Egyptian afterlife. The deserts shaped civilization as much as the Nile, creating buffer zones between Egypt and its neighbors. Egyptians ventured into the deserts mainly for raw material extraction, long-distance trade, or military campaigns. The Western Desert, though driest and most desolate, was punctuated by five major oases with permanent water sources large enough to sustain substantial populations. The Bahariya, Dakhla, Farafra, Kharga, and Siwa Oases were valued as agriculturally productive regions. The resource-rich Eastern Desert yielded raw materials for art and architecture, and routes through it extended to the western Sinai and the Red Sea, expanding Egypt’s reach to Mesopotamian, Levantine, and more southerly African spheres.

3-SECOND SURVEY

The Nile allowed civilization to thrive, but the desert and oases were equally intrinsic in shaping the practical and conceptual parameters of the Egyptians’ world.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Ancient Egypt’s sole surviving map is a 5 ft. 9 in. x 1 ft. 8 in. (1.75 x 0.5 m) papyrus of the New Kingdom (King Ramesses IV) illustrating part of the Wadi Hammamat, one of the most important Eastern Desert routes to the Red Sea. Its main purpose was probably resource procurement—the focal destinations are stone quarries and gold and silver mines. Major land features are highlighted, along with some constructions, such as an Amun temple, an expedition settlement, and a well.

RELATED HISTORIES

THE NILE

EGYPT’S NEIGHBORS

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

GERTRUDE CATON-THOMPSON

1888–1985

English archaeologist

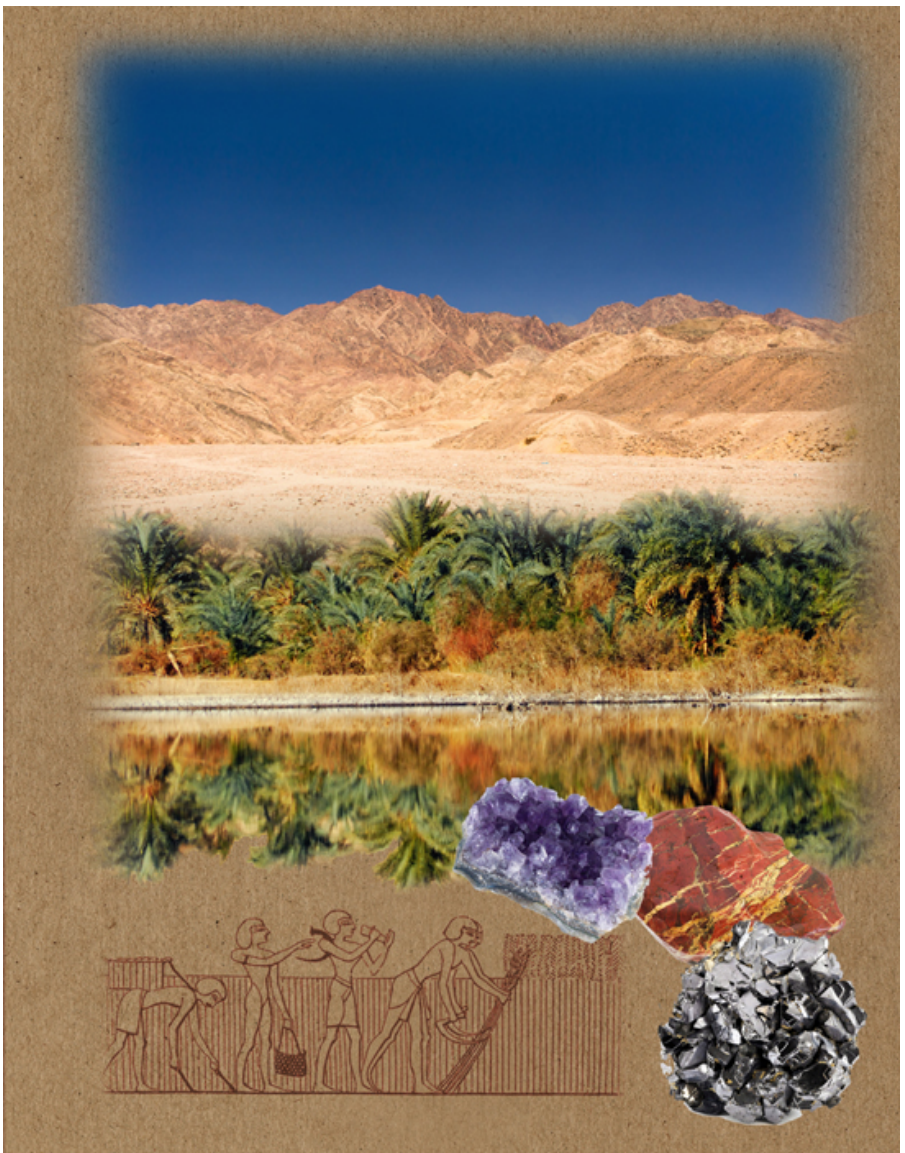
AHMED FAKHRY

1905–1973

Egyptian archaeologist and Egyptologist; Director of Desert Researches, Egyptian Antiquities Service 1944–1950

30-SECOND TEXT

Nicholas Picardo



Deserts were dangerous places, but provided rich resources of rocks and minerals. In contrast, agriculture and civilization could thrive in the oases.

RISE OF THE STATE

the 30-second history

Egypt is geographically divided between the verdant Delta in the north—Lower Egypt—and the narrow strip of arable land—Upper Egypt—in the south. In the Prehistoric Period, principalities dotted the land, each with its own rulers and culture. At the end of the fourth millennium BCE, a series of local rulers from southern Egypt—notably at Abydos and Hierakonpolis—embarked on an original endeavor: the amalgamation of principalities into a unified kingdom. Traditional accounts of early Egyptian history have emphasized what the ancients wanted posterity to believe: that a southern king called Narmer led a military takeover of the north. One side of a stone commemorative palette shows Narmer bashing an enemy over the head, while the other shows the king striding toward two rows of decapitated and castrated foes. While the idea of military conquest cannot be discarded, archaeology reveals a more nuanced narrative, with trade goods from the south making their way north in a kind of “cultural imperialism,” with the northern culture eventually subsumed by southern goods and traditions. In another theory, the northerners emulated, but did not necessarily import, southern objects. Although buried at Abydos in Upper Egypt, the rulers established their new capital at Memphis, in the area between Lower and Upper Egypt.

3-SECOND SURVEY

In the late fourth millennium BCE, rulers from the south extended their control of the Nile Valley northward, forming the first unified state in history.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Narmer’s ruthless treatment of his enemies was echoed in the meaning of his name, “The Menacing Catfish,” a particularly large and powerful fish. Subsequent kings also used aggressive epithets to describe their reign; kings of the First Dynasty called themselves “The Fighter,” “The Repeller,” “The Cobra,” and “The Head Cutter,” among others. Scenes of public executions also indicate the level of coercion exercised by royal authority.

RELATED HISTORIES

NARMER

HIERAKONPOLIS “MAIN DEPOSIT”

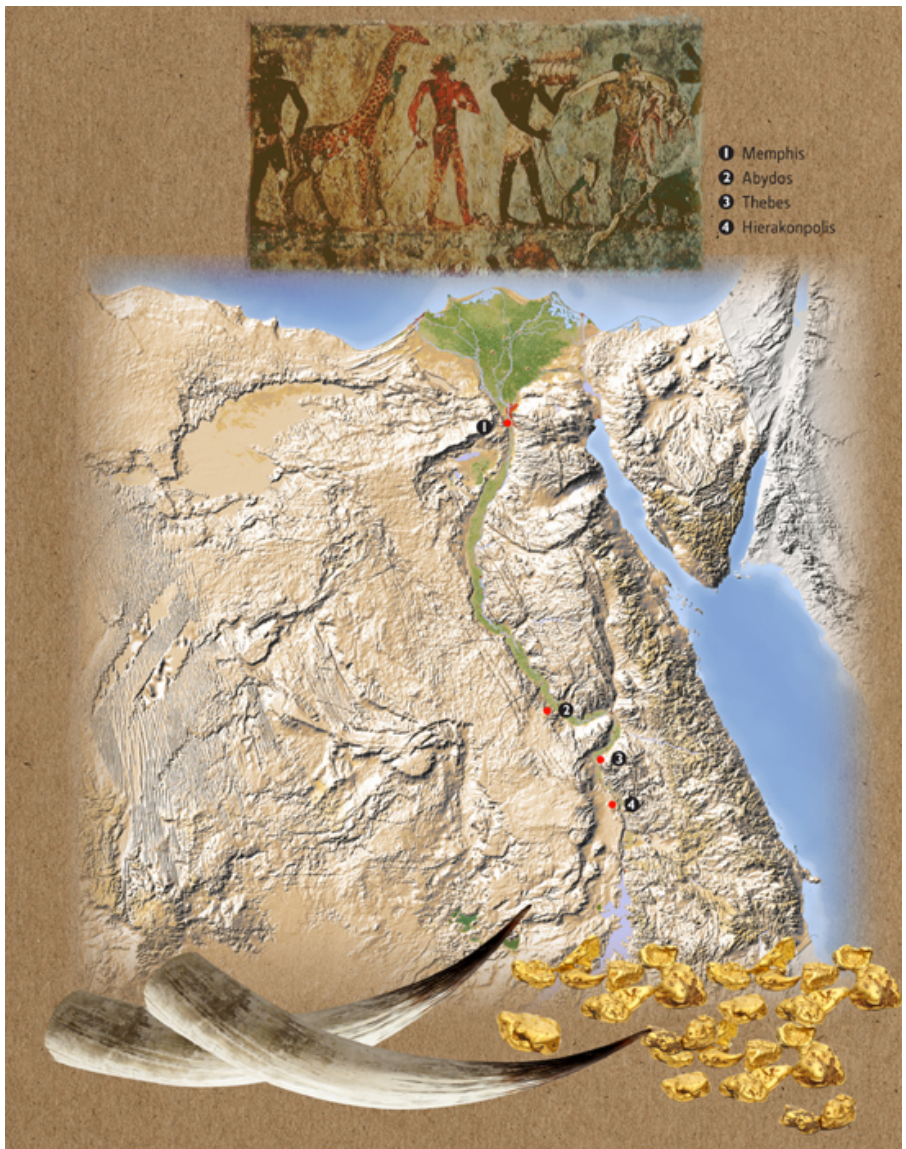
3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

NARMER

ca. 2960 BCE

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



Whether by military conquest or through trading goods, Upper and Lower Egypt were unified and a new capital established in Memphis.

PHARAOH

the 30-second history

Imagine a president, the pope, a general, the secretary of state, and the chief of police. Now roll them all into one individual, and you have the Egyptian pharaoh. The word derives from per-aa, or “great house,” signifying the palace. This institution of kingship evolved from ancient Predynastic times, as diverse culture groups settled along the Nile and developed the elements of a complex society. Both human and divine, the pharaoh issued edicts, built temples, led military campaigns, controlled irrigation projects, and dispensed justice. Revered as he was, however, assassination was not unheard of, but this was action against the man, not the institution of kingship. Pharaohs are instantly recognizable by their regalia: crowns, special headdresses, ceremonial false beards, hieroglyphic names inside oval rings called cartouches, and the most elaborate tombs—whether pyramids or rock-cut chambers—ever built. Some pharaohs are known as great builders (Snefru, Khufu, and Amenhotep III), others as warriors (Thutmose III, Ramesses II), or shrewd politicians (Amenemhet I, Psamtik I), but alas we know almost nothing of individual personalities. In sculpture, almost every king displays stylistic features that help us to identify his image. In a few extraordinary cases, a woman declared herself pharaoh (Nitocris, Sobekneferu, Hatshepsut, and Cleopatra).

3-SECOND SURVEY

All power and justification in Egyptian society emanated from the top down, as the pharaoh embodied the bridge between heaven and earth, gods and humans.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

As the guarantor of maat (truth, justice, prosperity, and cosmic harmony), the omnipotent pharaoh embodied every aspect of temple and state. Not an easy job, guarding the borders, managing the inundation of the Nile River, appeasing the gods, and controlling a network of ambitious elites.

RELATED HISTORIES

NARMER

DYNASTIES

SNEFRU

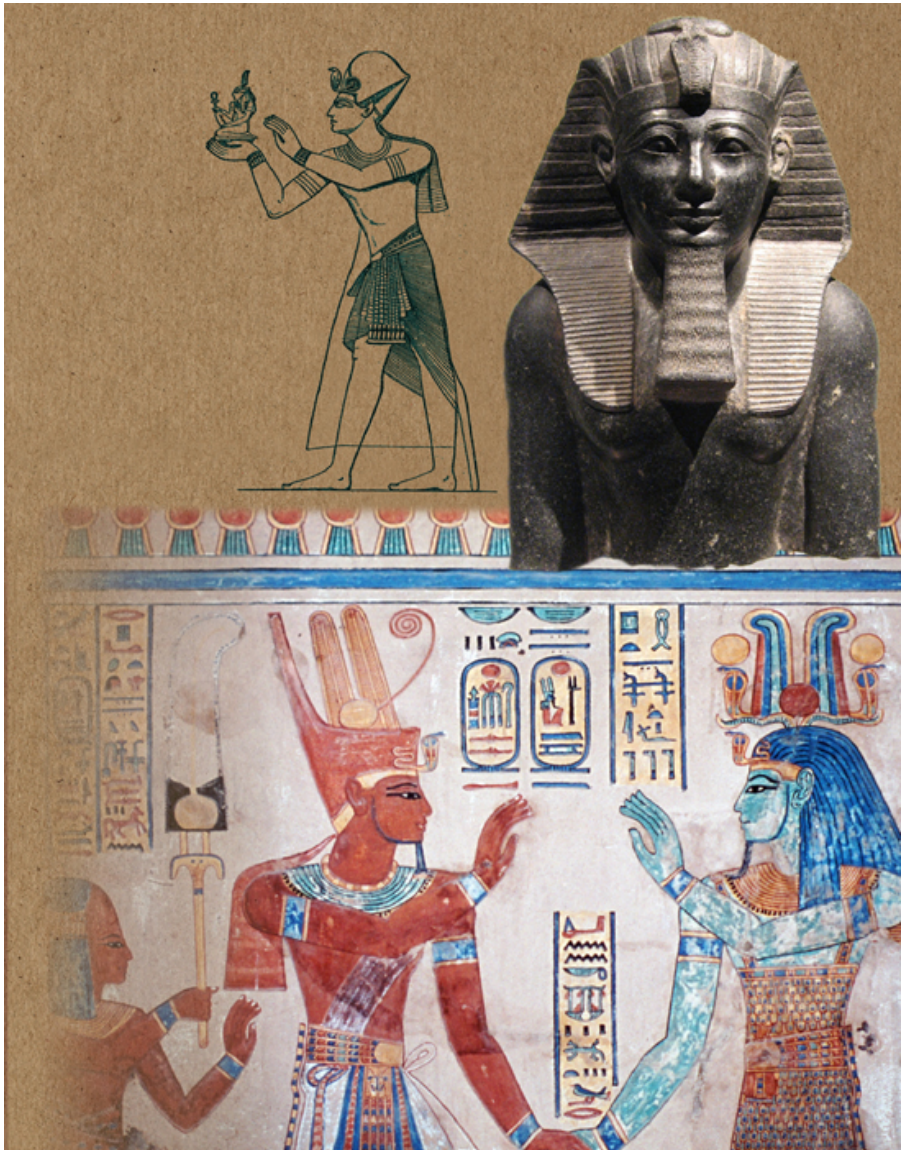
SENWOSRET III

THUTMOSE III

AKHENATEN

30-SECOND TEXT

Peter Der Manuelian



As supreme ruler of Egypt, the pharaoh held both secular and divine roles. Egyptian kings are instantly recognizable by their symbolic regalia.

NARMER

Narmer, the first ruler of united Egypt who is more to us than just a name, became known in 1898 when archaeologists excavated two relief-decorated objects bearing his name from the so-called “Main Deposit” at Hierakonpolis. On one side of a virtually perfectly preserved monumental palette made for grinding eye paint, Narmer is depicted wearing the White Crown of Upper Egypt while executing a cowering inhabitant of the Nile Delta. On the other side, wearing the Red Crown of Lower Egypt, he views a display of ten beheaded corpses. These scenes were long believed to commemorate the decisive victory in the struggle to unify Egypt under a single ruler that took place around 3100 BCE. Nowadays, however, scholarship favors viewing the palette’s theme as a post-unification defeat of rebels—an actual event that occurred in a year that was then named after it.

The other object from Hierakonpolis, a huge, ceremonial mace head, depicts an enigmatic scene involving Narmer, a woman in a carrying chair (perhaps a goddess or a royal woman), and captives.

At the turn of the 20th century, William Matthew Flinders Petrie, the “father” of Egyptian archaeology, thought he had found Narmer’s tomb among those of Egypt’s first kings at Abydos; however, subsequent research showed that Narmer was actually buried in a different tomb at the site. In 1985, a German team reexcavating the cemetery discovered seal impressions confirming Narmer’s position at the head of a list of First Dynasty kings. In the impressions, the hieroglyph in the king’s name previously understood to depict a catfish looks rather more like the skin of an animal with a long tail. This has led to doubts about the traditional reading of “Narmer” (and its translation as something like “Raging Catfish”) but no convincing alternatives have yet been proposed.

The king’s name, regardless of how it is read, is found on a variety of objects from a 20½-in (52-cm) tall alabaster statue of a baboon he commissioned, now housed in Berlin’s Neues Museum, to shards of pottery from sites in Lower Egypt, northern Sinai, and southern Canaan. These last show the wide-ranging trade contacts of the early Egyptian state.

Whether Narmer was King Menes, the first mortal ruler of Egypt according to later Egyptian sources, is questionable.



DYNASTIES

the 30-second history

*How do you organize a long list of hundreds of pharaohs who ruled for more than 3,000 years? The ancient Egyptians reset the clock with every new pharaoh, dating his reign from “year 1” onward. They kept king lists and archives—several survive on tomb and temple walls—and were aware of ruling families and genealogies. But the concept of dynasties first appears with Manetho, an Egyptian priest from the third century BCE. His *Aegyptiaca* history separates all the pharaohs into 31 Dynasties, or ruling houses, from Menes to the Persian Darius III. Today, Egyptologists still adhere to this system. In some cases, there is a clear change of ruling house; in others, we cannot quite discern why Manetho introduced a new dynasty. And the fault may not be his: Manetho’s work survives only in quotations by later authors, such as Josephus, Africanus, Syncellus, and Eusebius, each with his own agenda to push. Egyptologists further arrange the dynasties under major periods, such as the Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms, interrupted by “intermediate periods,” and all followed by the Late Period (see chronology, [here](#)). Much of this terminology forces an artificial lens onto the course of Egyptian history, but would be hard to replace.*

3-SECOND SURVEY

*Third-century BCE priest Manetho, commissioned to write his *Aegyptiaca* by Ptolemy I and II, was the first to organize ruling houses in Egyptian history into dynasties.*

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

It is hard to fathom why the Sixth Dynasty represents a new dynasty, when its first rulers bore connections to the royal family from the Fifth Dynasty. Similarly, the 18th Dynasty begins with the same family of Theban princes from the 17th. Today, we love the dynasty concept so much that we even have a “Dynasty 0,” the Protodynastic Period just prior to the First Dynasty.

RELATED HISTORIES

RISE OF THE STATE

PHARAOH

NARMER

SENWOSRET III

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

MANETHO

ca. 323–246 BCE

Egyptian priest from Sebennytos, wrote Aegyptiaca during the reigns of Ptolemy I and II

30-SECOND TEXT

Peter Der Manuelian



King lists recording names, dates, and, in some cases, key regnal events were carved onto tomb and temple walls.

EGYPT'S NEIGHBORS

the 30-second history

In Egyptian ideology, Egypt was the land of culture and order, while foreign lands represented chaos. Texts and depictions typically speak of three other human races besides the Egyptians: the Libyans to the west, the Nubians to the south, and the Asiatics to the northeast. In the areas bordering on Egypt, other languages were spoken: Semitic dialects on the Sinai peninsula and in Palestine, Libyan (an early form of modern Berber) to the west of the Nile Delta and valley, as well as Nilo-Saharanic and Kushitic languages in the south. Immigration from these areas to Egypt occurred frequently and led to the settlement of Nubians (such as the Pan Grave Culture), Palestinians (who ruled as the Hyksos from 1650–1530 BCE), and Libyans (who reigned over many Delta principalities in the Libyan Period). During the second millennium BCE, Egypt colonized Nubia (Kush) south of the Nile's First Cataract. It also made Palestine (which comprised a system of Canaanite city-states) an imperial province during the New Kingdom. When Egypt lost its external colonies around 1070 BCE, independent states emerged in Palestine and a Kushite empire in the Sudan. Egypt benefited from its neighbors not only economically, but also culturally, and in turn, those civilizations experienced substantive Egyptianization.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Egypt's location between the Levantine civilizations to the northeast, and Libyan and Sudanese Africa to the west and south benefited it both economically and culturally.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

The Egyptians adopted many innovations from neighboring cultures, particularly in the areas of military technology, textile production, craft, religion, literature, and language. In return, Egyptian culture spread to Nubia and Palestine, where artifacts and iconography show that they were Egyptianized.

RELATED HISTORIES

THE DESERT & THE OASES

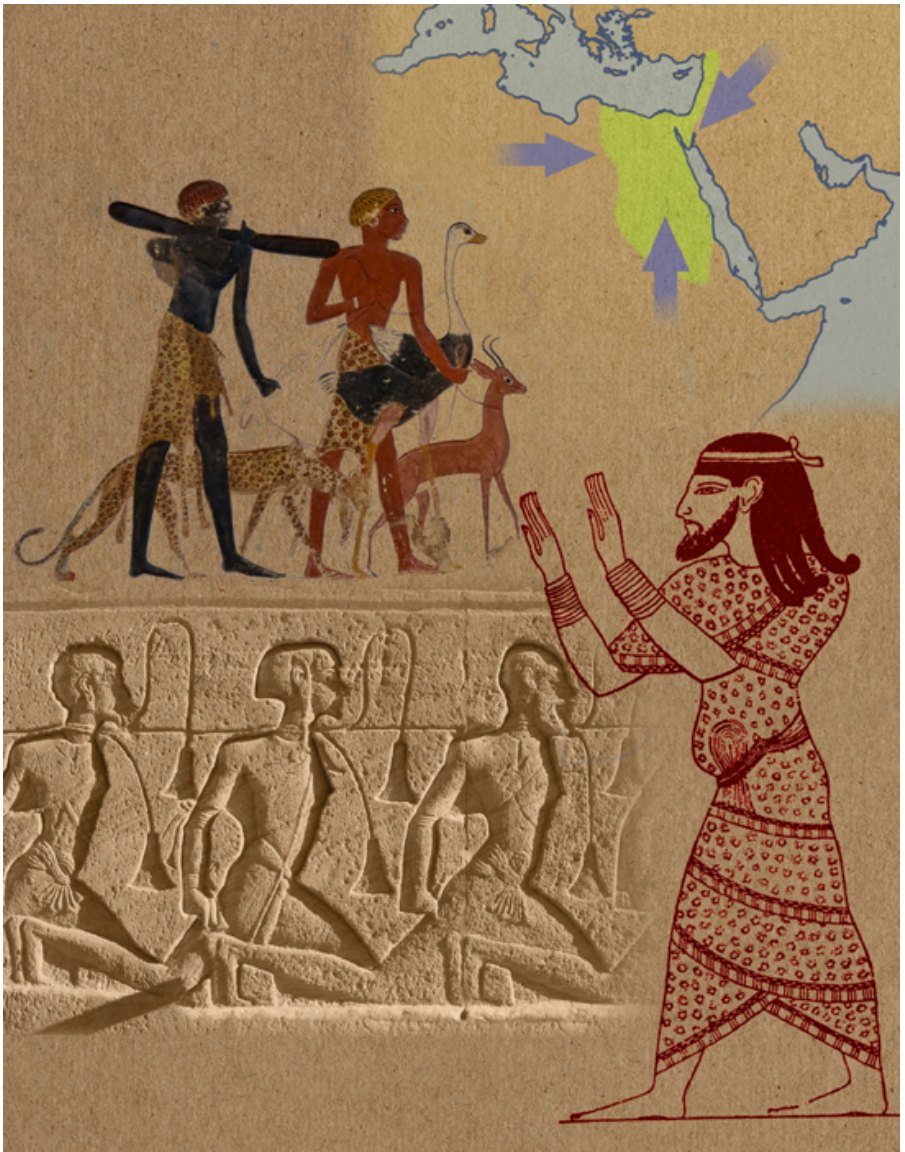
ETHNICITY & POPULATION

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

WOLFGANG HELCK

1914–1993

German Egyptologist who propelled the study of Egypt's interrelations with its neighbors



Libyan, **N**ubian, and Asiatic immigrants brought technological, economic, and cultural innovations to Egypt, and they were themselves Egyptianized.

ETHNICITY & POPULATION

the 30-second history

Until the mid-20th century, Western scholars often attributed the rise of Egypt's civilization to a non-African population, even a white race, whereas the Afrocentrist movement of the later 20th century saw in the ancient Egyptians black Africans. Neither of these ideological claims can be upheld. Modern population biology has replaced the concept of culturally defined races with a dynamic understanding of populations with overlapping characteristics that gradually shift across a geographical range. The anthropological study of Egypt's ancient populace shows that it was African in origin; it also emphasizes considerable continuity between the ancient population and the modern. Throughout its history, Egypt experienced continuous immigration, but foreign ethnicity appears nowhere as a negative feature and was even a positive trait from the New Kingdom onward. It is difficult to determine what the total population of Egypt was at any given time; a rough estimate is four million inhabitants for the New Kingdom. The capital Memphis had about 150,000 inhabitants at its peak; large cities, such as Thebes, Amarna, and Heliopolis, perhaps 50,000; and provincial centers about 5,000. Most of the population, however, lived in the countryside in hundreds of small villages.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Ancient Egypt's population was African in origin and there is a high degree of continuity between the ancient and the modern populace, despite many modern ideological claims to the contrary.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

The interplay of different population groups is most visible at Egypt's borders. A prime example is the site of Avaris (modern Tell el-Daba), founded as the first outpost east of the Pelusiac branch of the Nile in the Eastern Delta in the late 12th Dynasty. Settled by immigrants from Palestine on behalf of the state, the city displays Egyptian and Palestinian cultural features side by side—the latter include Palestinian architecture, donkey burials, and the interment of the dead within the settlement.

RELATED HISTORIES

EGYPT'S NEIGHBORS

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

WILLIAM MATTHEW FLINDERS PETRIE

1853–1942

Founder of Egyptian archaeology, who postulated a “Dynastic race” as responsible for the emergence of Egypt

MARTIN BERNAL

1937–2013

Author of Black Athena, a central work for Afrocentrism

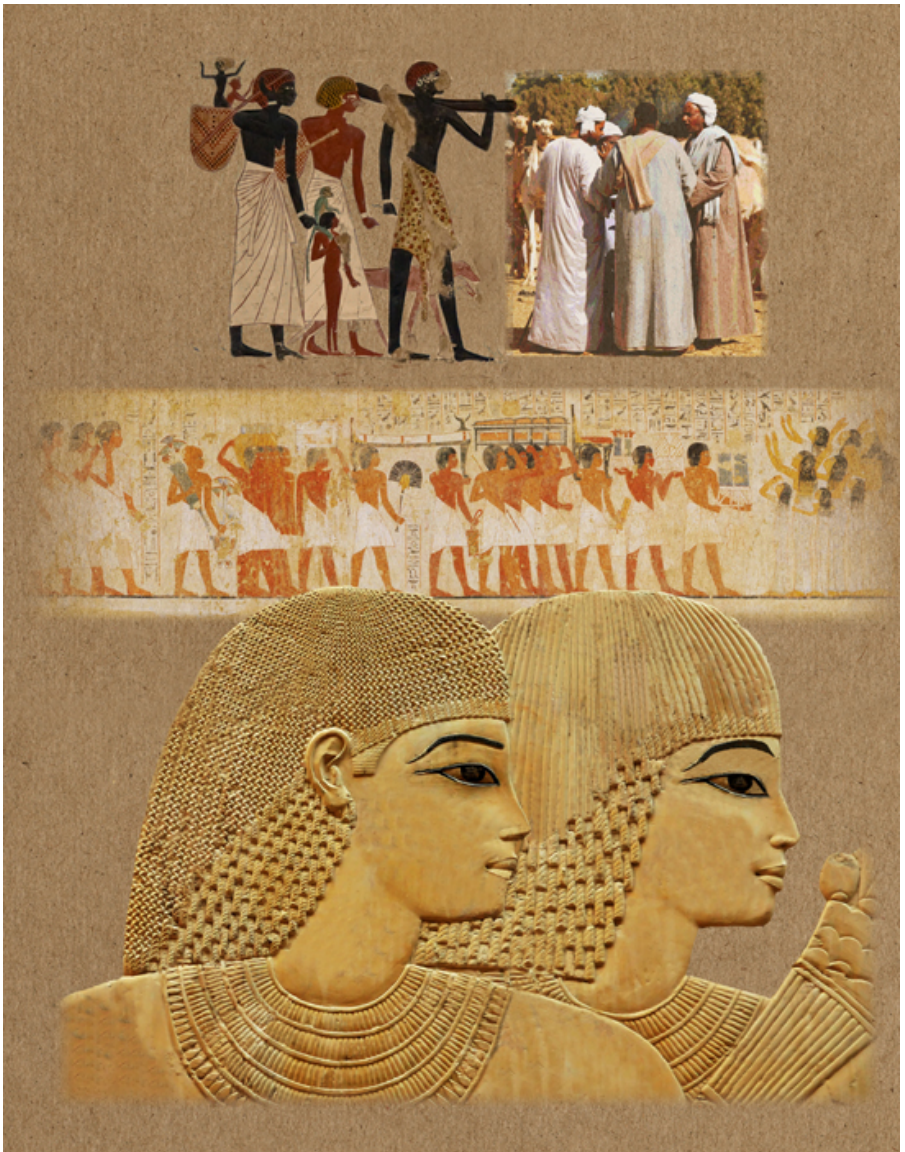
MANFRED BIETAK

1940–

Austrian Egyptologist and excavator of Avaris/Tell el-Daba

30-SECOND TEXT

Thomas Schneider



Immigrants were swiftly acculturated within the wider population. Modern Egyptians share many ethnic traits with their ancient forebears.



ARCHITECTURE & SITES

ARCHITECTURE & SITES

GLOSSARY

bay A simple surveying tool made from a palm rib, probably used for sighting in the manner of a modern theodolite.

burial chamber A room inside a tomb, usually underground, that contained the mummy of the deceased and burial items. It was intended to be sealed forever after the burial had taken place.

cubit A unit of measurement represented by the length of a bent human elbow to the tips of the middle fingers. In Egypt, the earliest standard measure was the royal cubit, which was about 20 in. (52.5 cm) in length.

funeral complex Also called mortuary complexes. An assemblage of monuments built in association with the burial of the deceased pharaoh. One of the best-known funeral complexes is the Step Pyramid of Djoser (Third Dynasty).

heb-sed A festival that celebrated the continued rule of the king after he had been on the throne for 30 years (with some exceptions), and was then repeated every three years after that. It was a jubilee meant to rejuvenate the strength and stamina of the king and involved an elaborate procession, rituals, and offerings.

mastaba An Arabic term for a type of bench that sits outside many modern Egyptian village houses. The term is used by Egyptologists to describe a type of ancient nonroyal elite tomb superstructure that imitates the mastaba shape (flat roofed and rectangular, with outward sloping sides).

merkhet A surveying tool used in leveling to maintain a straight line. It was essentially an L-shape plumb bob secured on a holder aligned with a cleft staff. The bob would hang from the short vertical arm.

mortuary temples Temples dedicated to commemorating the cult of the deceased king and the reign of the pharaoh (often a son) who commissioned or completed its construction.

offering chamber Also called a funerary chapel. A place (usually above ground) that was accessible to visitors to perform rites and make offerings of food and drink for the cult of the deceased.

pylon A monumental gateway that flanked the entrance of Egyptian temples. It consists of two tapering towers joined by a lower section containing the entrance. Pylons were important symbolic components of temple architecture because they represented the horizon (akhet) from which the sun rose.

pyramid town A settlement for priests and others responsible for the pyramid construction and cult maintenance of the deceased king, which began during the Old Kingdom. The town could consist of residential houses, workmen's barracks, storage buildings, granaries, workshops, gardens, and administrative centers.

rock-cut tomb From the Old Kingdom onward, tombs began to be carved into the rock, usually on the side of a hill, as a cheaper alternative to mastabas.

royal city The residence of the pharaoh and central administration, which was also usually the capital of the country. It contained palaces, temples, administrative buildings, storehouses, barracks, granaries, houses for the court and high officials, as well as a suburban area for nonroyals.

step pyramid The earliest pyramids were step pyramids, architectural structures that used flat platforms or steps, which receded from the ground up. The Third Dynasty architect Imhotep designed the first, largest, and most famous step pyramid at Saqqara as a tomb for the pharaoh Djoser.

traditional pyramid In the Fourth Dynasty, Egyptians began to build true pyramids that have smooth sides. The first attempts occurred at Meidum and Dahshur under King Snefru, and eventually led to the construction of the great pyramids at Giza.

tumuli Also called burial mounds. Mounds of earth, sand, or stone superstructures, which marked the placement of graves.

Valley of the Kings Located on the West Bank of the Nile, opposite modern Luxor, a number of tombs were constructed for the pharaohs of the New Kingdom west of a mountain peak with a natural pyramid shape. About 63 tombs have been discovered here, most of which were robbed in antiquity; the greatest assemblage of burial equipment was found in the famous tomb of King Tutankhamun.

Valley of the Queens The burial place for the wives of pharaohs of the 18th to 20th Dynasties on the West Bank of the Nile at Thebes. Princes, princesses, and other royal family members were buried here alongside the queens. The most spectacular tomb here belonged to Queen Nefertari, wife of Ramesses II.

CONSTRUCTION

the 30-second history

Egyptian pyramids, tombs, and temples still stand as pinnacles of ancient engineering, inspiring awe and prompting questions about how premodern technologies could construct them. However, most Egyptian architecture was built of mud brick and plaster. With a ready supply of Nile silt and the hot sun to bake them, mud bricks were simple to make and manipulate. Limestone, sandstone, and granite were most commonly quarried as building material for large structures. Shaping of the blocks could be done at the quarry before being transported, with additional detailing added at the construction site. Egyptian builders mastered a basic tool kit consisting of measuring rods (in cubit units of about 20½ in./0.525 m and smaller subdivisions), engineers' squares, the bay (an instrument for sighting lines over a distance), and the merkhet (a device for gauging astronomical alignments), with which they achieved impressive accuracy—often less than an inch or so from being perfectly level or straight. Probably in different but coordinated configurations per project, several types of ramps facilitated the lifting of blocks weighing many tons to elevations that seem unimaginable without cranes. The ramps were dismantled upon completion of the building, leaving scant archaeological remnants at pyramid and temple sites.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Ancient Egyptian construction created enduring testaments to what is attainable when people put their minds—and thousands of well-organized arms, legs, and backs—to it.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Quarrying for building resources was itself a resource-intensive process. Many kings simplified matters by cutting corners—literally—by stripping stone from earlier royal monuments to use in their own. They did not necessarily see this practice as vandalism, but rather as the incorporation of the past into their own reigns. By building on the foundations of their forebears (again, sometimes quite literally), they maintained the continuity of Egyptian kingship in unison with architectural tradition.

RELATED HISTORIES

PYRAMIDS

TEMPLES

PRIVATE TOMBS

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

LUDWIG BORCHARDT

1863–1938

German Egyptologist

ALEXANDER BADAWY

1913–1986

Egyptian architect and archaeologist

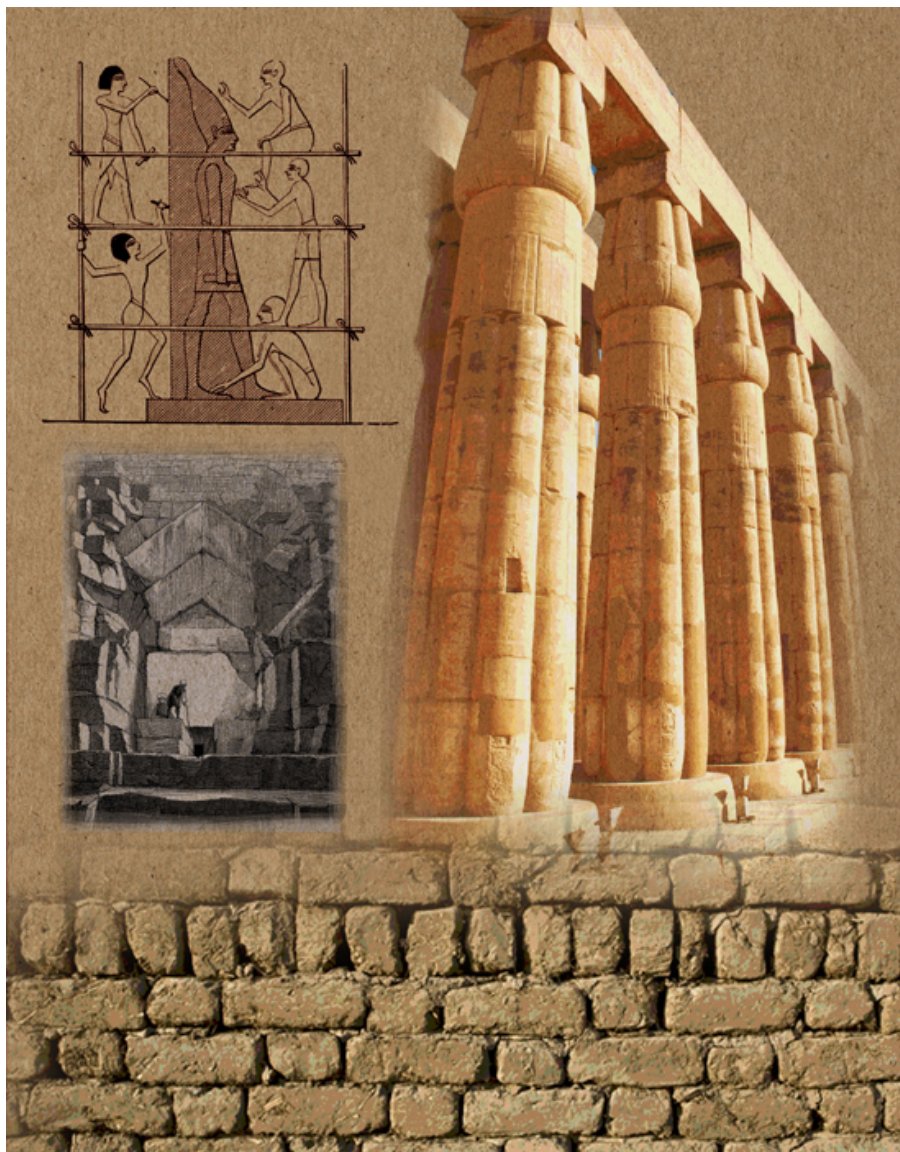
DIETER ARNOLD

1936–

German Egyptologist; Curator, Metropolitan Museum of Art

30-SECOND TEXT

Nicholas Picardo



Organized teams built the impressive stone structures that still survive today, but most buildings were made from mud brick.

PYRAMIDS

the 30-second history

What brings ancient Egypt to mind faster than the pyramids, man-made mountains of limestone? These iconic structures served primarily, but not exclusively, as royal burial places, the results of national projects to guarantee a successful afterlife for the deceased pharaoh, and by extension the order of the nation. Conscripted Egyptians—not Hebrew slaves—built these complexes, consisting of the pyramid, pyramid temple, a long causeway to a valley temple, and smaller satellite and/or queens’ pyramids. They were both cosmic staircases to the heavens and mansions of eternity. The famous pyramids at Giza, built in the Fourth Dynasty, resulted from years of experimentation. Mud-brick tumuli and rectangular mastaba tombs were expanded to step pyramids (King Djoser at Saqqara), then to the traditional pyramid form (King Snefru at Meidum, Dahshur), before reaching a zenith at Giza under Kings Khufu, Khafre, and Menkaure. Khufu’s Great Pyramid, the only surviving Wonder of the Ancient World, originally stood 481 ft. (146.5 m) high. No royal pyramids are found after the 17th Dynasty, but small pyramids adorned elite tombs at Thebes in the New Kingdom. Nubian royalty adopted the form; in fact, there are more pyramids in Nubia (about 255) than in Egypt (about 118).

3-SECOND SURVEY

As parts of massive funeral complexes for individual pharaohs, the pyramids helped define social stratification and bureaucratic project management during the Old Kingdom.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

At Giza, fine white limestone casing blocks that once covered the pyramids were removed to build medieval Cairo. They survive only at the top of Khafre’s pyramid (the second to be built). Decoration was sparse inside the Old Kingdom pyramids until the reign of Unas, last king of the Fifth Dynasty, when the Pyramid Texts, spells to guide the king on his netherworldly journey, first appear at Saqqara.

RELATED HISTORIES

CONSTRUCTION

PRIVATE TOMBS

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

SNEFRU

reigned 2575–2551 BCE

First pharaoh of Fourth Dynasty; built four pyramids, three of them colossal (at Meidum and Dahshur)

KHUFU

reigned 2551–2528 BCE

Second pharaoh of Fourth Dynasty, son of Snefru; built the Great Pyramid at Giza

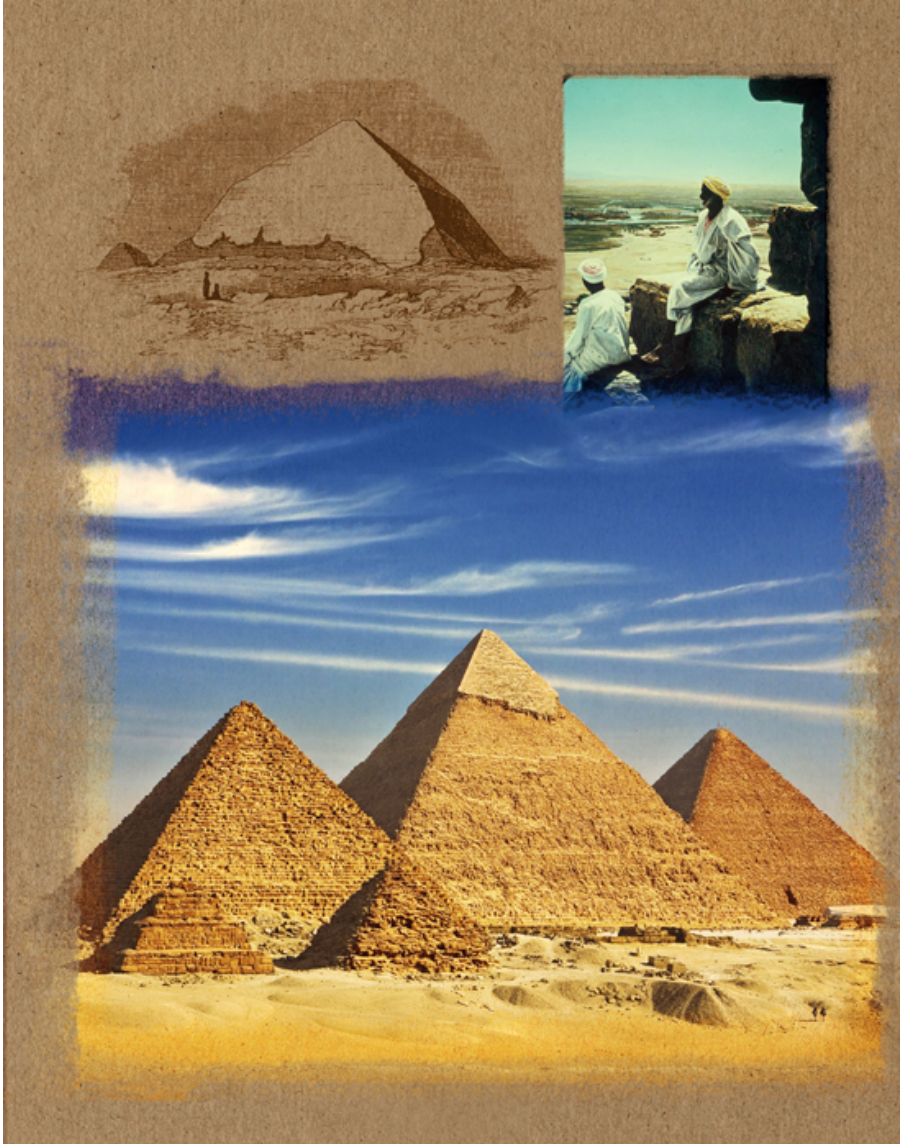
IMHOTEP

reign of Djoser 2630–2611 BCE

Thought to be Djoser's architect (tomb not yet located)

30-SECOND TEXT

Peter Der Manuelian



The Egyptians achieved the traditional pyramid form only after a few generations of

experimentation.

TEMPLES

the 30-second history

Most Egyptian towns had one or more temples dedicated to their main god(s). Temples symbolized the site of the original cosmic creation and housed divine cult statues that were fed, dressed, and adored by priests in daily ceremonies and carried to other sacred locations in public festival processions. The largest and most enduring was the Temple of Amun at Karnak, begun in the Middle Kingdom and augmented for the next 2,000 years with additional shrines, pylons, and columned halls. Offerings (often foodstuffs grown on temple lands or products crafted in temple workshops) were laid before the gods and then redistributed to temple priests and other workers as payment for their services. Temples were an important part of the national economy, because they could own tremendous tracts of farmland, vineyards, and herds of animals, while employing thousands of workers to produce crops and other commodities; scribes and administrators to record and distribute these products; and priests, who carried out the daily cult responsibilities. It was the job of the king, as nominal high priest of every god, to supply provisions and expand the temples, dedicating land, slaves, and spoils of war to their upkeep. By pleasing the gods, the king maintained cosmic order (maat) and secured favor for himself and the whole nation.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Temples were significant focal points in the religious, economic, and social fabric of ancient Egypt; they were places of cultic ritual, political propaganda, and economic redistribution.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

The Third Dynasty Step Pyramid Complex of King Djoser at Saqqara marked the first appearance of monumental stone architecture and provided a blueprint for later pyramid/funerary temple complexes, such as the famous examples at Giza. Mortuary temples, called “Mansions of Millions of Years” and dedicated to the perpetual maintenance of the cults of deceased and deified pharaohs, continued to be built through the New Kingdom, usually on the sacred West Bank of Thebes.

RELATED HISTORIES

PYRAMIDS

HIERAKONPOLIS “MAIN DEPOSIT”

KARNAK CACHETTE

MAGIC

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

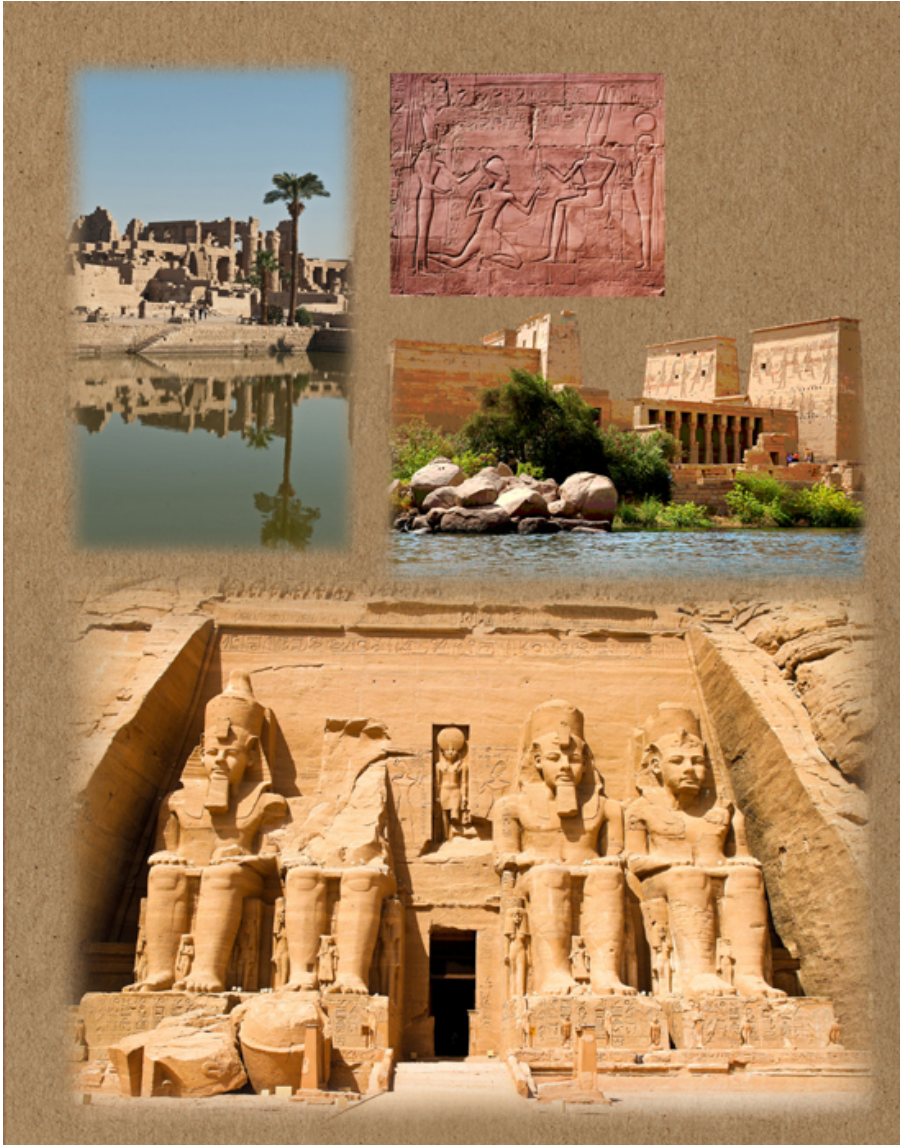
IMHOTEP

reign of Djoser 2630–2611 BCE

Third Dynasty priest, engineer, and architect of the Step Pyramid of King Djoser

30-SECOND TEXT

Rachel Aronin



Ancient Egyptian temples were elaborate complexes, built for economic and political purposes, as well as for religious rites.

Expectations are high for someone whose name can translate as “the one made perfect.” Snefru, first king of the Fourth Dynasty, certainly delivered, however imperfect historical records are about the length of his reign (24 to 46 years, starting in 2575 BCE) and his parentage. His accomplishments rank him among Egypt’s great kings. His father was probably Huni, last king of the Third Dynasty, though only a literary source suggests this. Queen Meresankh I, possibly a minor wife of Huni, was his mother. Snefru’s wife, Hetepheres, was possibly Huni’s daughter, thus his half-sister. That their son, Khufu, is remembered as the greatest pyramid builder attests that, for posterity, size matters. Khufu’s Great Pyramid at Giza is the largest ever constructed. However, with at least four pyramids, Snefru’s building program was most prolific, requiring the largest resource investment of the Pyramid age.

Snefru originated the traditional pyramid style, a recurring hallmark of Egyptian architecture for more than one thousand years. Two of his monuments recall the Third Dynasty, when King Djoser (2630–2611 BCE) erected the first royal pyramid—a stepped structure, then the largest stone building in the world. Huni may have begun constructing small step pyramids (seven known) throughout the country, to which Snefru contributed at least one at Seila. Development of the traditional pyramidal form was not seamless. Snefru began a 300-ft. (92-m) high, stepped monument at Meidum, subsequently filling out its exterior to form a traditional pyramid. Over halfway up his 344-ft. (105-m) high southern pyramid at Dahshur, shifting foundations necessitated an abrupt change in slope that inspired its modern name, the Bent Pyramid. Architects avoided such difficulties with Snefru’s probable resting place, the equally tall Northern (or Red) Pyramid at Dashur—the first colossal monument ever to be executed, uninhibited from start to finish, as a traditional pyramid.

Amassing resources for Egypt was a priority for Snefru. One expedition procured foreign wood—possibly including some Lebanese cedar, which was highly prized—with which he commissioned more than 60 ships and furnished royal buildings. Campaigns west to Libya and south into Nubia brought more than 8,000 captives and at least 213,000 head of livestock back to Egypt. Snefru’s endeavors set the tone for the remainder of the Old Kingdom, during which his successors’ similar policies effectively depopulated northern Nubia. However, it was for forays into the turquoise-rich Sinai Peninsula that later generations remembered Snefru as a divine patron of this northeast region and as the “smiter” of foreign peoples. More generally, though, he was recollected fondly as a benevolent ruler.



PRIVATE TOMBS

the 30-second history

The Egyptians tended to situate their tombs in the Western Desert, which, as the place where the sun set each night, was regarded as the land of the dead. Tomb architecture usually consisted of two main sections: an accessible above-ground offering chamber or chapel and a sealed subterranean burial apartment. In the chapel, priests and family members left gifts of food and drink before a “false door,” through which the deceased’s spirit was believed to emerge to take nourishment. In the Old and Middle Kingdoms, tombs were laid out formally in elite cemeteries near the royal pyramids, so that officials could share in the blessed afterlife of their king. After the collapse of the state at the end of the Sixth Dynasty, rock-cut tombs carved into cliffs bordering the Nile became common in the provinces of Middle and Upper Egypt. Chapels could be decorated with carved and painted reliefs of idealized scenes of daily life, showing the tomb owner receiving offerings, overseeing agriculture or craft-production, or hunting and fishing. During the New Kingdom, increased access to mortuary literature led to new ritual and religious imagery appearing on private tomb walls, including funerary banquets and festivals, and deities associated with the afterlife, such as Osiris, Anubis, and Hathor.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Tombs were fashioned as houses for eternity, constructed from enduring stone rather than more perishable materials, like the mud bricks that formed actual earthly domiciles.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Some of the most splendidly decorated New Kingdom private tombs belonged to the skilled craftsmen of the village of Deir el-Medina, the same men who built the magnificent royal tombs in the Valley of the Kings and the Valley of the Queens. Later, during the Saite Renaissance of the 26th Dynasty, a number of very large, “archaizing” tombs were built at Thebes and Saqqara, deliberately hearkening back to the styles and/or iconography of earlier eras.

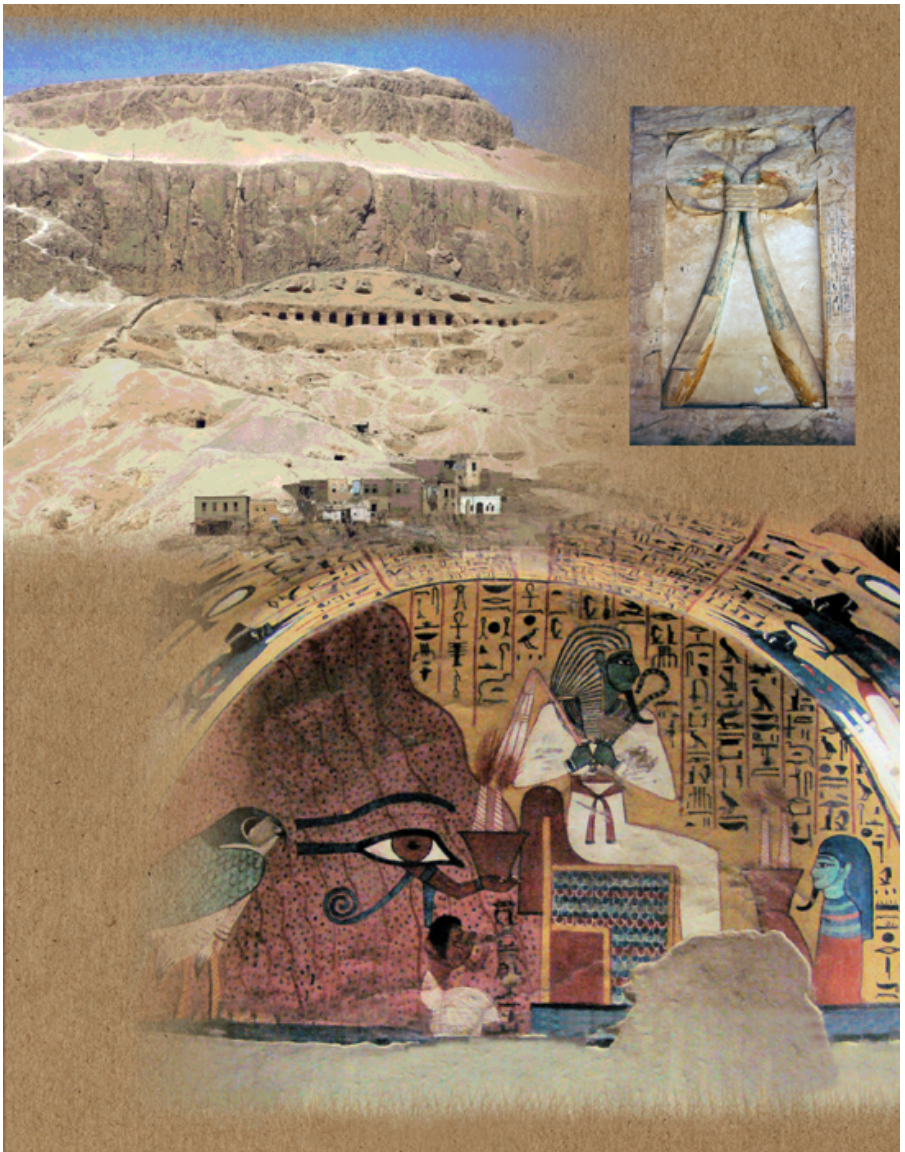
RELATED HISTORIES

OSIRIS & RESURRECTION

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

MORTUARY TEXTS

PAINTING & RELIEF



Nobles and high officials could be buried in rock-cut tombs (top left). Elaborate decorations often included images of Osiris (bottom).

SETTLEMENTS

the 30-second history

It is impossible to point to a “typical” ancient Egyptian settlement. Many small, informally built villages in which a large percentage of the population probably lived are now lost beneath modern developments. Most of the best-known settlements were founded by the state for special purposes. The so-called Lost City of the Pyramid Builders at Giza provides a sense of the complexity of an Old Kingdom pyramid town, consisting of an organized patchwork of administrative buildings, workshops, storage facilities, and workers’ lodgings. The gridded plan of King Senwosret II’s pyramid town at Kahun is emblematic of Middle Kingdom tendencies for planning and regulation, with a modular layout based on a strictly limited number of house sizes, ranging from huge mansions to small houses of just a few rooms and sectioned into blocks by a highly regular street system. The Amarna Period capital of Akhetaten (Tell el-Amarna) is the best surviving example of a sprawling capital city, with suburbs and a downtown administrative district all linked by a great thoroughfare on which King Akhenaten made regular displays of royal pageantry. In the residential zones, large villas often were associated with smaller houses, where dependents of their estates resided.

3-SECOND SURVEY

The variety in forms, functions, and social makeup of ancient Egyptian settlements ensure that knowledge about many aspects will remain rather unsettled for years to come.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Usually limited in size and repetitious in use of one house style, workers’ settlements served specific projects. A town of only barracklike gallery houses accommodated Middle Kingdom quarrying expeditions in the Fayum at Qasr el-Sagha. New Kingdom artisans and artists who outfitted the Valley of the Kings and Valley of the Queens occupied the more irregular village of Deir el-Medina, possibly relocating to the square, desert village of Akhetaten for similar employment during the Amarna Period.

RELATED HISTORIES

ETHNICITY & POPULATION

CONSTRUCTION

PALACES

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

SIR WILLIAM MATTHEW FLINDERS PETRIE

1853–1942

British archaeologist and Egyptologist

LUDWIG BORHARDT

1863–1938

German Egyptologist

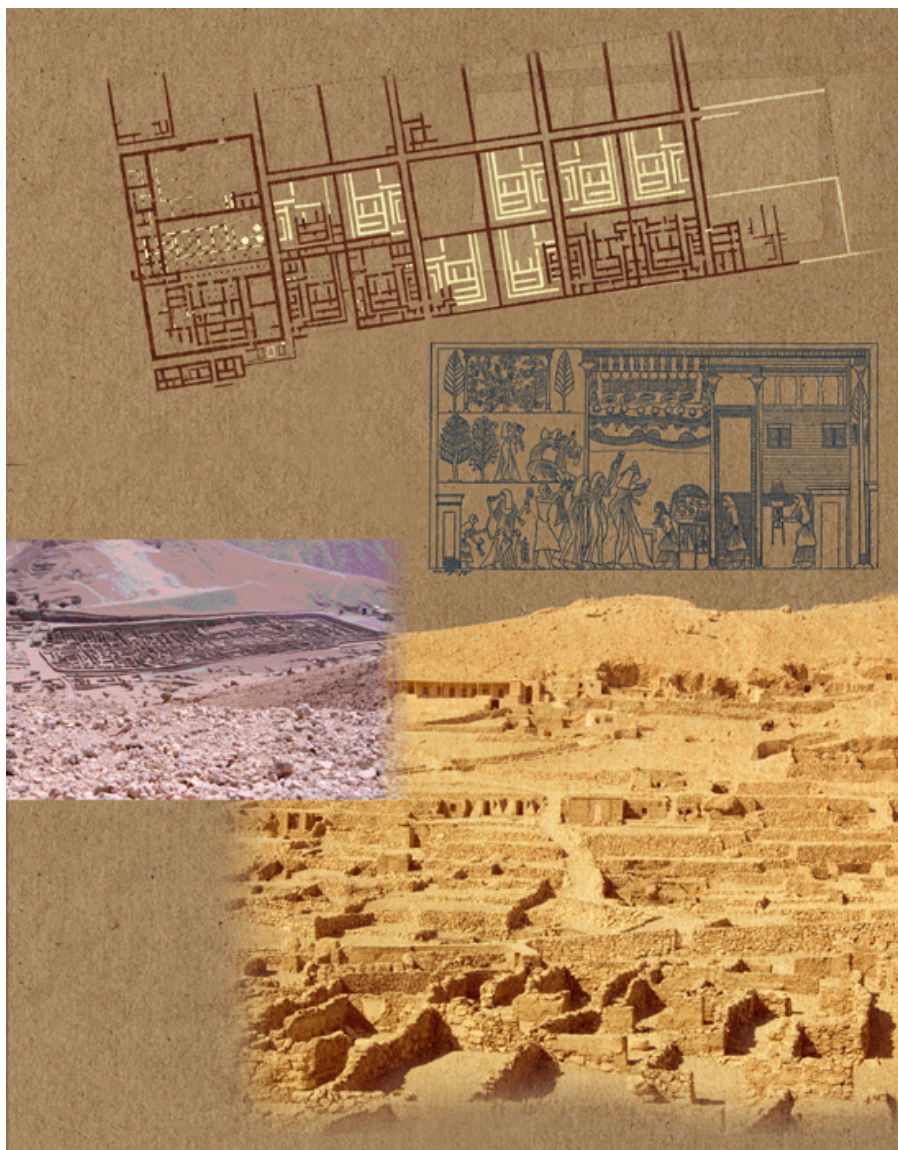
MARK LEHNER

1950–

American archaeologist and Egyptologist

30-SECOND TEXT

Nicholas Picardo



Intended for temporary use, workers' towns had grid layouts and basic housing.

PALACES

the 30-second history

The personal, political, and religious aspects of kingship converged in palaces. Some kings commissioned several, each emphasizing some royal needs over others—primary state residences, provincial palaces, ceremonial structures, and even palaces for the afterlife. As domestic architecture, their construction was of mud brick with some stone fixtures. Pharaohs often built palaces in new settlements, such as pyramid towns through the Middle Kingdom and in royal cities from the New Kingdom onward. Archaeological and textual evidence indicates that palaces could include private living apartments with baths and robing rooms; women’s quarters; audience rooms; administrative offices; kitchens, workshops, weapons stores, and treasuries; housing for staff; and landscaped gardens with ponds. Commemorating a jubilee (heb-sed) festival, King Amenhotep III furnished his royal city at Malqata with a main palace plus three residential palaces, perhaps for Queen Tiye and other family members. Akhenaten’s capital at Tell el-Amarna included a fortified, residential North Riverside Palace, a nearby North Palace, and a templelike Great Palace (the per-Aten, “House of the Aten”) for governing (but with an attached “King’s House”). Likewise, King Merneptah’s palace at Memphis may have been more official than residential.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Just as Buckingham Palace and the White House are inseparable from their occupants today, for ancient Egyptians palaces were the architectural embodiments of king and country.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

From early times, the person of the king and the royal residence were conceptually entwined. Before a cartouche came to signal a royal name in writing, the serekh—an emblem representing niched, “palace facade” architecture—advertised kingly status. One term for palace (per-aa, “great house”) gradually evolved to mean pharaoh. So closely linked were the kings with their palaces that many New Kingdom royal mortuary temples incorporated abbreviated palaces to perpetuate their dominions for eternity.

RELATED HISTORIES

PHARAOH

SETTLEMENTS

AKHENATEN

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

AMENHOTEP III

reigned 1390–1352 BCE

Ninth king of 18th Dynasty, New Kingdom

AMENHOTEP IV/AKHENATEN

reigned 1352–1336 BCE

Tenth king of 18th Dynasty, New Kingdom

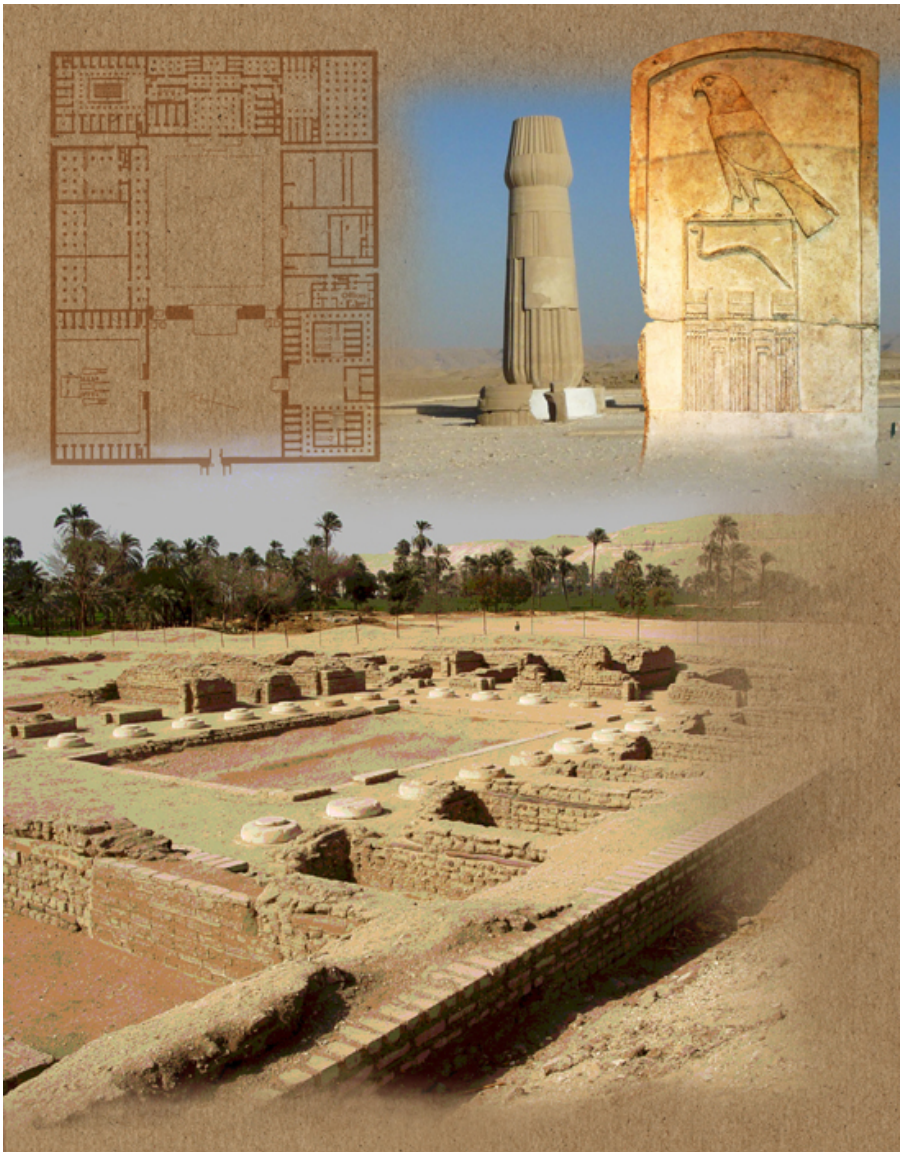
MERNEPTAH

reigned 1213–1203 BCE

Fourth king of 19th Dynasty, New Kingdom

30-SECOND TEXT

Nicholas Picardo



The serekh (top right) represented a palace facade surmounted by a Horus falcon. Akhenaten built several palaces at Tell al-Amarna.

FORTRESSES

the 30-second history

Egypt always cast a wary eye toward Nubia, its southern neighbor. The first defensive gesture, made during the First Dynasty, was a fortification on Elephantine Island, at the original southern border of the country. After incursions into Egypt by Nubians in the First Intermediate Period, 12th Dynasty rulers sent armies south to curb the power of the chieftains of Lower Nubia, between the First and Second Cataracts. Additional security measures included building a series of mud-brick forts in Lower Nubia. Many of these contained architectural features associated with medieval forts: massive walls with bastions and additional ramparts with parapets, large gates, protective ditches surrounding the fort, corner towers, crenellated loopholes for archers, and stairways dug into the rock to ensure access to water. The garrisons were supplied from government armories in Egypt. The purpose of the forts was two-fold: to protect the exploitation of natural resources, such as gold and copper, and to ward off the Ruler of Kush, who controlled a vast territory at the Third Cataract and whose military might rivaled that of the Egyptian king. New Kingdom pharaohs conquered Nubia up to the Fourth Cataract, at which point the forts became home to large garrisons, and administrative offices were supplemented by religious structures.

3-SECOND SURVEY

During the 12th Dynasty, forts were built in Lower Nubia to protect Egypt's southern frontier and its commercial interests in the area.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

The fortified exterior walls of Buhen Fort, about 16 ft. 6 in. (5 m) thick, indicate that the fort was designed to withstand a siege. The interior, measuring around 426 ft. 6 in. x 361 ft. (130 x 110 m)—big enough to fit a football field—shows organized urban planning, with streets arranged in a grid pattern. Well-defined living areas include a two-story building that housed the general headquarters, adjacent to which were barracks.

RELATED HISTORIES

EGYPT'S NEIGHBORS

SENWOSRET III

THUTMOSE III

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

SENWOSRET I

reigned 1971–1926 BCE

Second king of the 12th Dynasty

SENWOSRET III

reigned 1878–1841 BCE

Fifth king of the 12th Dynasty

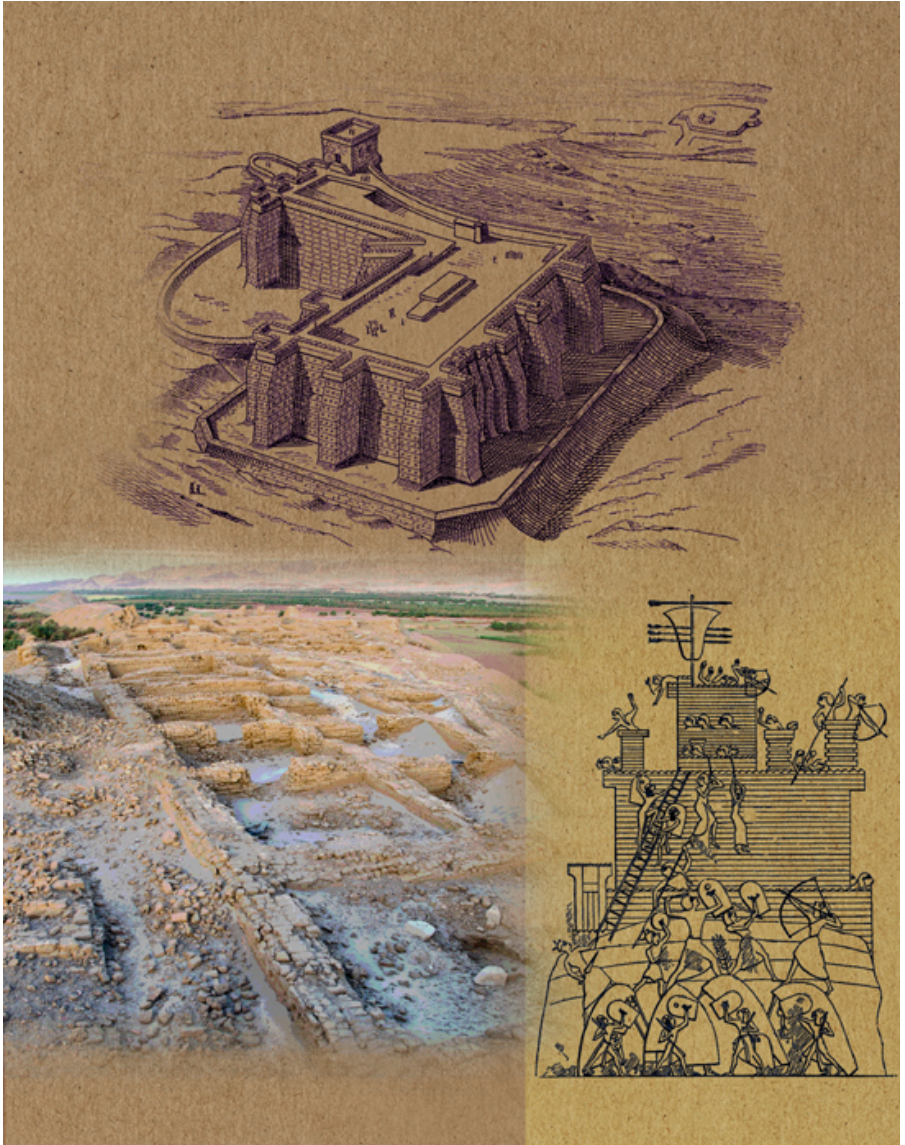
THUTMOSE III

reigned 1479–1425 BCE

Fifth king of the 18th Dynasty

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



The mud-brick fortresses built at Semna and Uronarti during the 12th Dynasty defended the strategic

location of the Second Cataract.



GREAT DISCOVERIES

GREAT DISCOVERIES

GLOSSARY

block statues A unique type of Egyptian sculpture that first appeared during the 12th Dynasty. The subject (almost always male) squats on the ground with his knees drawn up to his chest. In one type, arms, legs, and torso are enveloped in a cloak providing space for inscriptions.

burial cache A collection of items found stored and sealed together in or near a burial or tomb chamber for safekeeping.

burial shaft A deep rectangular pit usually dug vertically into the ground that was accessed through the roof of a tomb on ground level. The deceased body and burial goods were usually placed in a chamber at the bottom of the shaft.

canopic A vase, jar, chest, or other container that held one of the internal organs of a body removed during the mummification process. There were four canopic jars per set, one each for the liver, the stomach, the lungs, and the intestines.

chariotry The introduction of chariotry as a military unit and weapon in ancient Egypt, whereby chariots (light, open, two-wheel carriages pulled by horses) were used to carry riders into battle, occurred during the Hyksos invasion at the end of the Middle Kingdom. Chariots were effective for high speed, strength, and mobility during warfare and hunting.

cuneiform This term means “wedge shape,” referring to one of the earliest known systems of writing, which is characterized by imprints or wedge-shaped marks. It first appeared on tablets in Sumer from about 3100–2900 BCE.

Dynasty 0 (ca. 3100–2960 BCE) Refers to the transition period between the Predynastic and Early Dynastic Periods of ancient Egyptian history, also called Naqada III. It was a time of ongoing state formation and political unification where kings began to be present at the head of influential states.

faience More correctly known as “Egyptian faience,” this blue-green glaze is a nonclay ceramic of silica made from sand or crushed quartz. It was commonly used to make jewelry, amulets, scarabs, figurines, and vessels.

fingerbreadth A unit of measurement that is the approximate width of an adult human finger. It was used to measure length.

funerary goods Funerary objects or grave goods played an important part in Egyptian burial customs. The items that were placed in the tomb with the deceased were objects that could be used in the afterlife. Most of these goods were everyday objects: pots, chests, tools, baskets, furniture, amulets, statues, clothing, weapons, etc.

mortuary text A general term that encompasses various collections of text that deal with life after death and act as guidebooks to help the deceased ascend to the afterlife and become one with the gods. Examples include: Pyramid Texts, Coffin Texts, and the Book of the Dead.

mummy A naturally or artificially preserved deceased human or animal body that has been conserved through drying of the skin and organs.

Red Crown The crown of Lower Egypt worn by the king of that region. Its formal name was *deshret*.

sarcophagus A container used to protect a mummified body, generally made of stone.

shabti A funerary figurine placed in tombs as part of the grave goods to act as a substitute for the deceased in the afterlife by performing manual labor tasks. Many were inscribed with the name of their owner and a shabti spell.

solar cult The term *cult* (synonymous with *ritual*) in ancient Egypt refers to the religious actions people performed to interact with the gods. In temples, divine cult involved adoration of the gods and the presentation of offerings. *Solar cult* refers to the ritual worship of the sun as a god.

stela A standing stone or wood tablet used to mark a tomb or boundary that was normally decorated with inscriptions, reliefs, or paintings. *Stelae* could also be used as votive monuments set up by individuals to worship gods or as commemorative monuments to record special events.

vassal state A state that is owned or dominated by another state and subordinate to it.

White Crown The crown of Upper Egypt. Its formal name was *hedjet*.

HIERAKONPOLIS “MAIN DEPOSIT”

the 30-second history

The Greek historian Herodotus (fifth century BCE) and the Egyptian priest Manetho (third century BCE) recounted that a King Min or Menes was the first ruler of a unified Egypt. It took the archaeologist's spade to expand that narrative and push the history of Egypt farther back in time. Two British Egyptologists, J. E. Quibell and F. W. Green, began their work in 1897 at Hierakonpolis in southern Upper Egypt. In the 1898–99 season, in a low mound on the northern part of the site, they discovered a pit dug below the floor of a temple. Hundreds of discarded temple furnishings dating to the late Prehistoric and Early Dynastic Periods had been carefully buried during a later temple renovation. Largely grouped by type were stone mace heads and palettes (such as the Scorpion Mace Head and Narmer Palette), metal and stone statues, ivory and faience figurines, a large pottery lion, and other objects. A lack of accurate records from the original excavation makes it difficult to date the pit, with suggestions ranging from the Old to the New Kingdoms. The importance of the find lay in the discovery of hitherto unknown rulers who predated the kings of the First Dynasty, and the subsequent proposal for a so-called “Dynasty 0.” The most famous monarch of Dynasty 0 is King Scorpion.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Hierakonpolis, the “City of the Hawk,” was home to the earliest rulers of a unified Egypt. The best known of these is King Narmer.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Some things you just don't throw away. When priests deposited the Narmer Palette into a pit in the floor of a temple under reconstruction, they were burying one of their most iconic royal monuments. From the White Crown worn on one side and the Red Crown on the other, to the bull's tail attached to his kilt, the king is sporting regalia that would be seen on royal representations for three millennia.

RELATED HISTORIES

RISE OF THE STATE

NARMER

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

MANETHO

ca. 323–246 BCE

Egyptian priest

JAMES EDWARD QUIBELL

1867–1935

British archaeologist

FREDERICK WILLIAM GREEN

1869–1949

British archaeologist

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



One of the most famous discoveries from Hierakonpolis, the **Narmer** Palette depicts the king vanquishing his enemies.

HETEPHERES' TOMB

the 30-second history

When is a tomb not a tomb in ancient Egypt? When the body is missing—or was never there in the first place. This is the great mystery of Queen Hetepheres' tomb at Giza. As the wife of King Snefru and the mother of King Khufu, Hetepheres should have enjoyed an elaborate subsidiary pyramid, perhaps near her husband's pyramid at Dahshur. But Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition staff stumbled upon her burial shaft at Giza, sunk almost 100 ft. (30.48 m) below the limestone bedrock, just east of her son's Great Pyramid at Giza. No superstructure, no pyramid, no chapel. The year was 1925, and expedition director George Reisner was teaching at Harvard when his team made the find: piles of deteriorated wood and gilded furniture, pottery, metal vessels, and jewelry. Meticulous documentation over the next two years allowed for stunning restorations of some of the oldest furniture from the ancient world. But a canopic chest with organic matter still in liquid form after 4,600 years was all that remained of the queen. Was she moved here from Dahshur? Was she buried in one of Khufu's queens' pyramids? Were plans changed due to temple and causeway construction up on the surface? Was this a funeral deposit, not a burial? A definitive explanation awaits.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Perhaps the greatest Giza discovery, this deep burial shaft and chamber revealed hundreds of deteriorated objects, plus one empty alabaster sarcophagus. But where was Queen Hetepheres originally buried?

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

George Reisner loved detective novels and his intriguing theory about the Hetepheres burial (original tomb at Dahshur, robbery, then a secret reburial at Giza but with the body destroyed, unknown to Khufu) has all the makings of one of his beloved thrillers. This romantic story is difficult for us to accept today, but no other explanation offered since has answered all the questions either.

RELATED HISTORIES

PYRAMIDS

MUMMIFICATION

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

TOMB ROBBERY

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

QUEEN HETEPHERES

ca. 2550 BCE

Wife of Snefru, mother of Khufu, Fourth Dynasty

GEORGE REISNER

1867–1942

Director of the Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition (23 archaeological sites over 42 years), Harvard professor and MFA curator.

30-SECOND TEXT

Peter Der Manuelian



Hetepheres' tomb contained many treasures, such as gilded furniture and jewelry—but no body.

MEKETRE MODELS

the 30-second history

Herbert Winlock couldn't believe it. After all, the tomb had been looted in ancient times, and Georges Daressy had explored these cliffs in 1895. On March 17, 1920, the Metropolitan Museum expedition was just reclearing Theban Tomb 280 for drawing when flashlights aimed through a crack in a partially collapsed corridor illuminated a world in miniature—the world of Chancellor Meketre, who served under Middle Kingdom pharaohs Nebhepetre Mentuhotep through Amenemhat I. Meketre packed a side chamber of his tomb with intricately carved models of plastered and painted wood, intended to magically be provision for his afterlife: two models of a house facade with a tree-lined courtyard pool to be sure of a luxurious home life; model carpentry and weaving workshops to craft household fixtures; and, supplied from a model granary, a bakery-brewery to produce staple bread and beer. In a 5-ft. 9-in. (1.75-m)-long model, Meketre and his scribes sit on a pillared porch counting livestock, which, after fattening in a model stable, seem destined for the slaughterhouse model. Two half-life-size female offering-bearers deliver baskets of food and beer, complementing a smaller, four-person funeral procession. Twelve model boats complete the set to accommodate mundane and sacred afterlife journeys alike.

3-SECOND SURVEY

As ancient Egyptians anticipated the twilight of their years, they envisioned—sometimes quite literally—a model life in the next world.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

In 1915 at Deir el-Bersha, the Harvard University–Museum of Fine Arts, Boston Expedition found the largest single set of wooden tomb models. Although ransacked by robbers, Tomb 10A (made for a provincial governor and his wife, both named Djehutynakht) contained at least 103 models, including offering-bearers; processions (soldiers, scribes, and officials); 8 granaries; 3 bakery-breweries; plowing, planting, and herding scenes; woodworking, weaving, and (rare) brick-making operations; 9 cattle feedings; and a fleet of 58 boats.

RELATED HISTORIES

PRIVATE TOMBS

TOOLS AND CRAFTS

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

GEORGES DARESSY

1864–1938

French Egyptologist

HARRY BURTON

1879–1940

English archaeologist and photographer; photographed the Meketre discovery

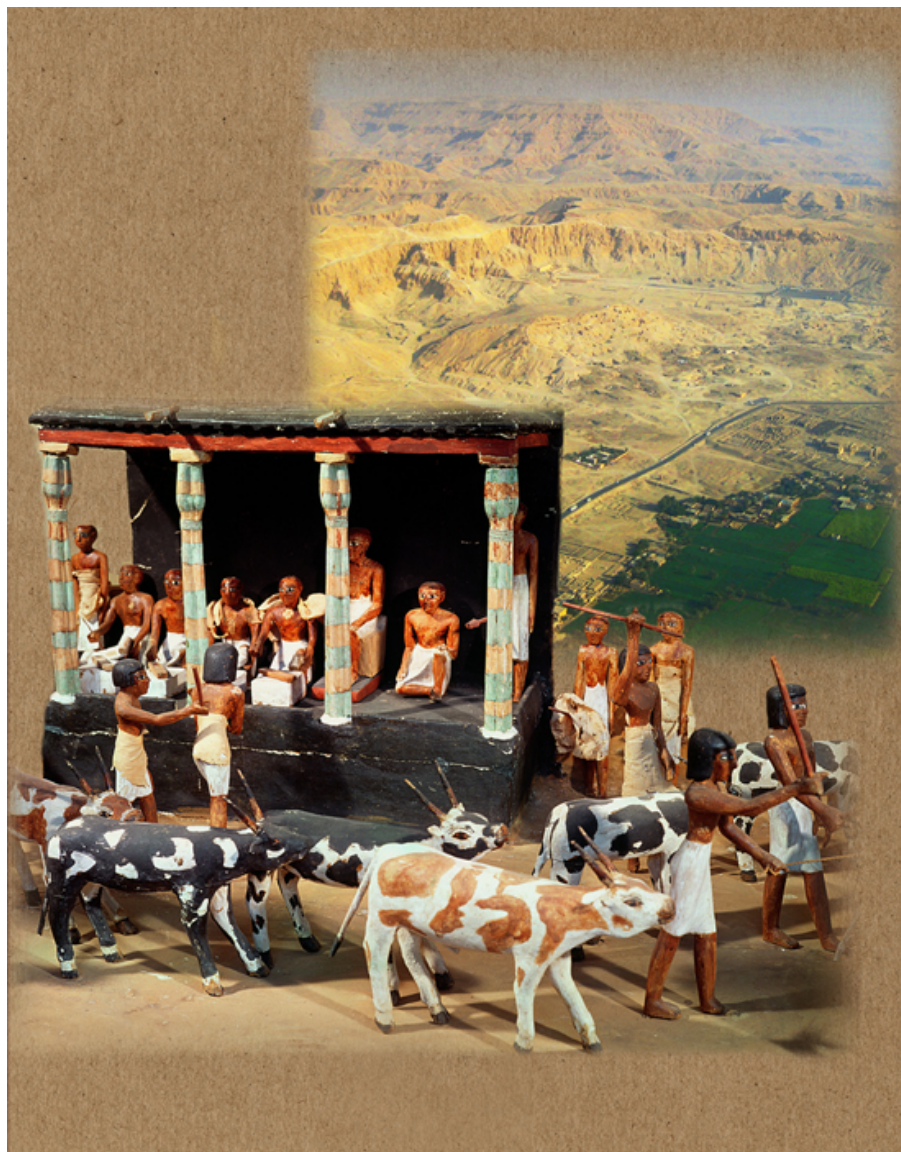
HERBERT WINLOCK

1884–1950

American Egyptologist and archaeologist, director of the Metropolitan Museum Expedition that discovered the Meketre models.

30-SECOND TEXT

Nicholas Picardo



This group of models portray the ideal afterlife, with all the deceased's worldly needs forever satisfied.

DEIR EL-BAHARI ROYAL MUMMIES

the 30-second history

In 1881, Gaston Maspero, the director of the Egyptian Antiquities Service, was alerted by the appearance of new royal objects on the antiquities market that a previously unexcavated burial had been discovered. Local tomb robbers had unearthed a rich tomb in the rocky cliffs at Deir el-Bahari a decade earlier and had been looting it ever since. Subsequently cleared by the Service, the tomb was originally constructed as the final resting place for the mummies and funerary goods of the family of the powerful High Priest of Amun, Pinudjem I, and his successors, who ruled as kings in southern Egypt during the 21st Dynasty. It was later used for the reburial of many of the greatest New Kingdom pharaohs, including the founder of the 18th Dynasty, Ahmose I; the warrior-king Thutmose III; and Ramesses II, one of the longest-reigning pharaohs in Egyptian history. Altogether more than 40 mummies of kings, queens, royal children, and members of the extended family of priest-king Pinudjem had been interred in the narrow corridors and two small chambers of the tomb. The New Kingdom mummies had been brought together sometime in the 22nd Dynasty, after their original tombs in the Valley of the Kings had been plundered, and reinterred in the Pinudjem family's well-hidden tomb for safekeeping.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Rampant tomb robbery during the later New Kingdom led the ancient Egyptian authorities to gather up and deposit many royal mummies in secondary burial caches.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Seventeen years after the amazing discovery of the Deir el-Bahari mummy cache, a second group of royal mummies was found, reburied in the tomb of Pharaoh Amenhotep II in the Valley of the Kings. It contained the remains of ten more New Kingdom rulers, including Amenhotep II and III, Merneptah (son and successor of Ramesses the Great), and possibly the female pharaoh Tausret, who ruled at the end of the 19th Dynasty.

RELATED HISTORIES

PRIVATE TOMBS

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

TOMB ROBBERY

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

ÉMILE BRUGSCH

1842–1930

German-born Egyptologist. Maspero's assistant and excavator of the Deir el-Bahari mummy cache

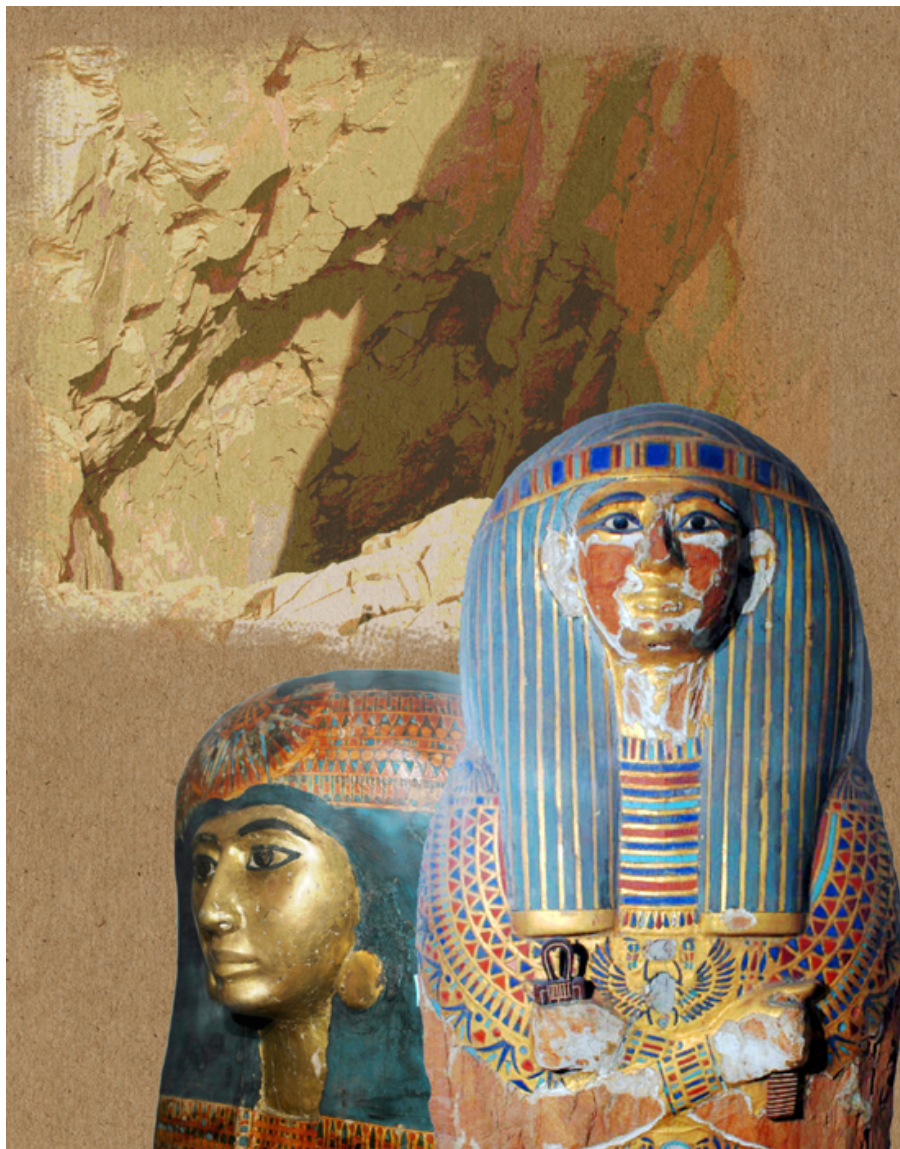
GASTON CAMILLE CHARLES MASPERO

1848–1916

French Egyptologist and director of the Egyptian Antiquities Service (1881–1886, 1899–1914)

30-SECOND TEXT

Rachel Aronin



Built for Pinudjem I (right) and his family (left) the tomb was later used as a safe reburial place for over 40 royal mummies.

SENWOSRET III

The reign of Senwosret III (1878–1841 BCE) epitomized the character of one of Egypt's stablest dynasties and had profound, lasting effects on government and society. The son of King Senwosret II and Queen Khnumetneferhedjet I, he was the fifth of eight kings comprising the 12th Dynasty in the Middle Kingdom. He married at least three wives, fathering five daughters. His successor, Amenemhat III (1844–1797 BCE), with whom he eventually shared the throne to ensure a smooth transition, was probably also his offspring.

Senwosret successfully initiated aggressive foreign and domestic policies. He annexed at least one area of Palestine, and Egyptian occupation of Nubia intensified substantially under his rule. Expanding old fortresses and building new ones beyond the Second Nile Cataract, he took firm control of the region and established a frontier farther south than that of his predecessors. The military embarked upon brutal campaigns to quash the growing power of the Kushite Nubians beyond the Third Cataract at the site of Kerma. Senwosret commemorated these exploits on boundary stelae at several forts, claiming to have burned crops, slaughtered livestock, and taken women and children captive.

Domestically, Senwosret III may have invented "Big Government." He adjusted the administrative districting of the country, added new bureaus at the capital, and brought the nation's labor force under tight state control. This was a time of burgeoning bureaucracy during which the government's regulatory arm stretched more pervasively into Egypt's provinces and towns. The king's statues represent him often with heavy, weary expressions as if to convey how taxing his efforts on behalf of the country were. However, whether the notably big ears on many statues denote a receptive royal listener or actual physiological features is debatable.

Senwosret III made an unusual decision to commission mortuary monuments at two locations. A traditional pyramid complex in the north at Dashur complements a subterranean tomb in the south at Abydos that foreshadows later tombs of the Valley of the Kings. It is not clear where he ultimately was buried; no mummy has been discovered. Senwosret's accomplishments secured him notoriety in history in several ways. Many centuries later, Classical historians in Egypt heard of a legendary King Sesostris, a figure clearly modeled on Senwosret III, but whose supposed achievements include some actually undertaken by his dynastic ancestor Senwosret I (1971–1926 BCE) and Ramesses II (1279–1213 BCE) of the New Kingdom's 19th Dynasty.



AMARNA LETTERS

the 30-second history

Discovered in 1887 by peasants digging for fertilizer at Tell el-Amarna, site of the ancient capital of King Akhenaten, the Amarna Letters recount the relationship between the pharaoh and the major rulers of the time, along with lesser vassal states in the Levant. Written in cuneiform script on clay tablets, the correspondence covers a period of around 25 years in the late 18th Dynasty. The powerful kings of Egypt, Mitanni, Babylon, and Assyria addressed one another as “brothers,” as in a family, while the subservient city-state rulers addressed the pharaoh as “my lord.” The main topics in the letters between the major powers were trade and diplomatic missions, marriages, and giving gifts. Sometimes one ruler felt slighted by another’s inferior offering—for example, the king of Mitanni grumbled to the recently widowed Queen Tiye that her husband Amenhotep III had promised him solid gold statues, but her son Akhenaten only sent wooden statues covered in gold. Vassals assured the pharaoh of their eternal loyalty while accusing their neighbors of rebelliousness. Akhenaten’s inactivity on these petty squabbles has occasioned the accusation of his not caring for state affairs but may have simply been sound politics, because he refused to meddle in local disputes.

3-SECOND SURVEY

The Amarna Letters are the diplomatic correspondence between the superpowers of the ancient Near East and their vassals in the 14th century BCE.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

The Amarna Letters indicate that the vassals farther away from Egypt felt particularly burdened by their oath of loyalty to the pharaoh. The king of the Hittites, at the peak of his power, pressured the northern city-state rulers in the Levant to either side with him or the Egyptian king. Some vassals honored their original pledge to distant Egypt, while others switched allegiance to the menacing new presence on their doorstep.

RELATED HISTORIES

EGYPT’S NEIGHBORS

PALACES

AKHENATEN

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

QUEEN TIYE

ca. 1398–1338 BCE

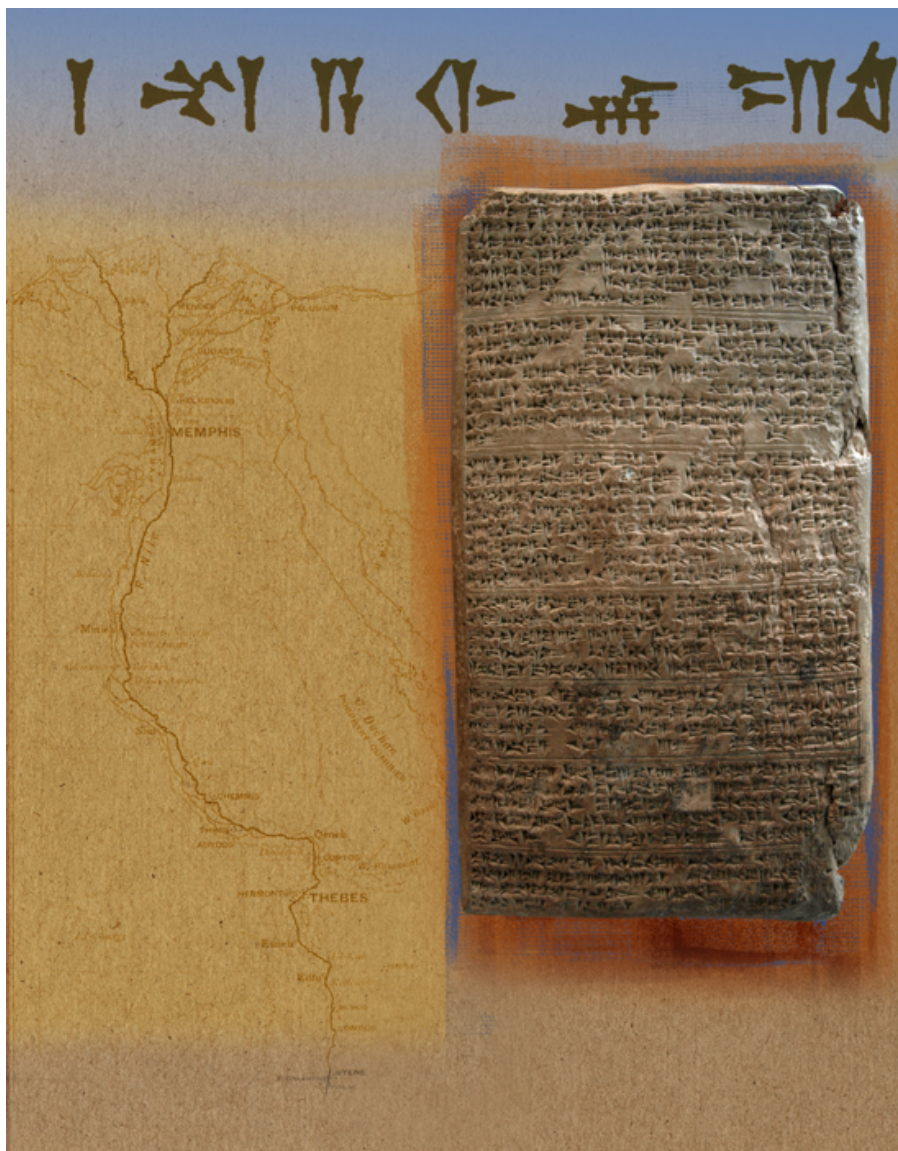
Wife of Amenhotep III

AMENHOTEP III
reigned 1390–1352 BCE
Ninth pharaoh of the 18th Dynasty

AKHENATEN
reigned 1352–1336 BCE
Son of Amenhotep III

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



The Amarna Letters provide a fascinating insight into international relations during the 14th century BCE.

THE BUST OF NEFERTITI

the 30-second history

The painted bust of Nefertiti, Akhenaten's principal queen, now belongs in the permanent collection of the Neues Museum in Berlin, Germany. Not universally considered the best likeness among her surviving sculptures, its fame rests in large measure on the lively impression the well-preserved painting makes, along with the inlaid eyes—one of which is now missing—which has inspired theories about the bust's function: did the master carve it as a model to be copied for other statues of the queen? Or did it play some role in the funerary cult? The use of red-brown paint, in contrast to the conventional yellow for women's skin, is analogous to sculptors' use of red-brown quartzite for other statues of royal women at Tell el-Amarna. This anomaly may reflect the role the queen and her daughters played in the solar cult as practiced by Akhenaten: they worshipped in the open, "caressed" by the sun's rays. Symmetry is characteristic of Nefertiti's facial features in her statuary. Sculptors used a grid based on the "fingerbreadth," an Egyptian measure of length ($\frac{3}{4}$ in. / 1.875 cm), to design likenesses of her. Whether the bust is a portrait based on Nefertiti's actual appearance is not known. Subtle signs of aging around the eyes suggest that the bust was made later instead of earlier in the reign of her husband.

3-SECOND SURVEY

The life-size bust of Queen Nefertiti wearing her tall blue crown is recognized worldwide as a symbol of ancient Egypt.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

On December 6, 1912, German archaeologists excavated the bust along with other sculptures, including a deliberately smashed bust of Akhenaten, from the home of master sculptor Thutmose at Tell el-Amarna. Following the division of the finds, both busts went to James Simon, holder of the license to excavate. After he ceded his portion to the German state, the queen's bust was exhibited publicly for the first time in 1923; calls for its return to Egypt, which continue to surface from time to time, soon followed.

RELATED HISTORIES

RE, THE SUN GOD

AKHENATEN

SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

THUTMOSIS

ca. 1350 BCE

Master sculptor

JAMES SIMON

1863–1932

Benefactor of Berlin's museums

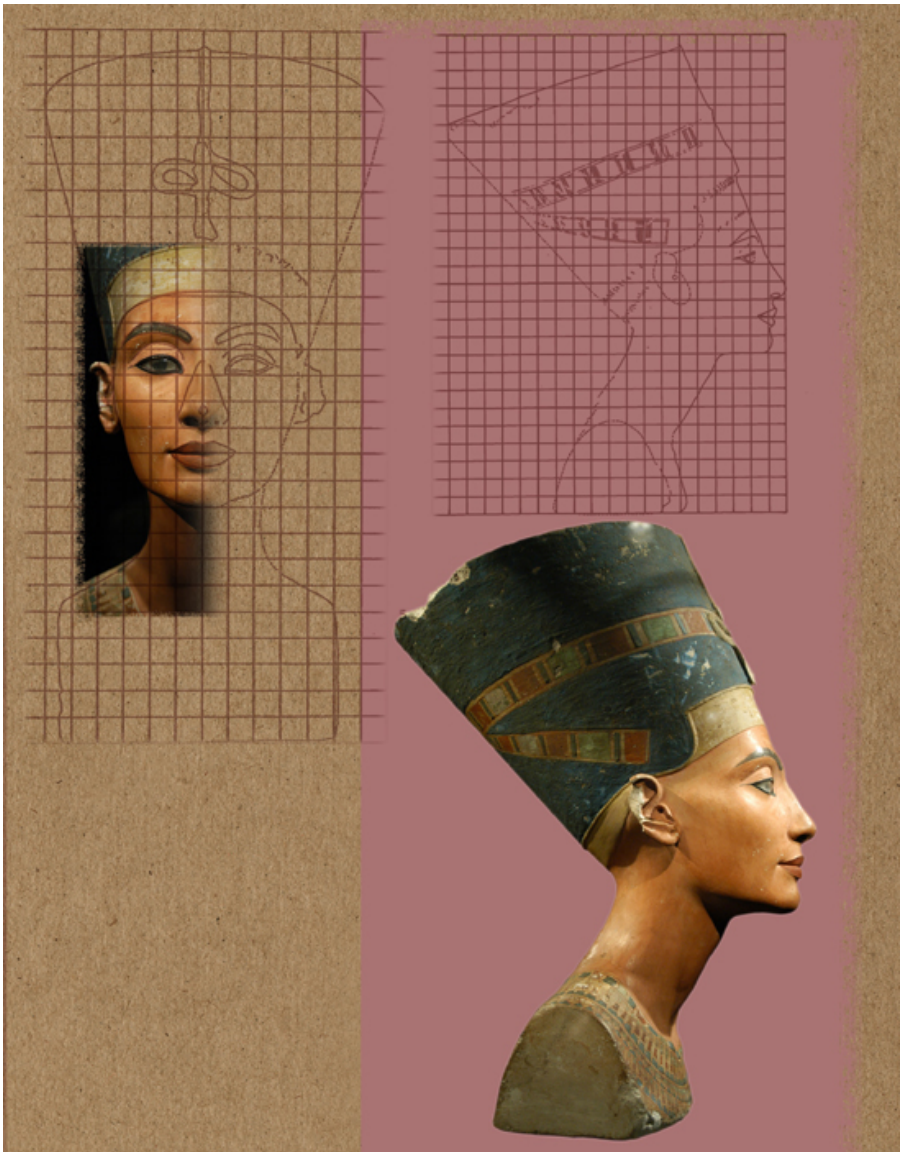
LUDWIG BORCHARDT

1863–1938

Architectural historian and archaeologist; director of the excavations that uncovered the bust of Nefertiti

30- SECOND TEXT

M. Eaton-Krauss



Egyptian sculptors based their designs on the fingerbreadth grid. This bust may have been used as a guide for other portraits.

TUTANKHAMUN'S TOMB

the 30-second history

Because the tomb in which Tutankhamun was laid to rest was not originally planned for a king, it had to be enlarged when he died to fulfill the minimum requirements for a pharaoh's burial. Two types of equipment comprised the "treasure": objects used by the king, both before and after his accession, and items essential for his journey to, and continued existence in, the hereafter. The first category included clothing, sandals, jewelry, furniture, games, and weapons. Some of these objects were inscribed for Tutankhaten, as the king was named at birth. The items for use in the afterlife included four gilded shrines inscribed with mortuary texts, the quartzite sarcophagus, three nested coffins (the innermost made of solid gold), the gold mummy mask, canopic jars, shabtis, food and drink, and amulets for magical protection. The contribution of the tomb to Egyptian political history was meager. Examination of the mummy showed that Tutankhamun, who had died as a teenager, was a royal family member, not a usurper as some scholars had supposed, and wine jar labels documented his reign as lasting for nearly a decade, while the scene and texts on the gold throne confirmed that his wife was the third eldest daughter of Akhenaten and Nefertiti.

3-SECOND SURVEY

The discovery of the virtually intact tomb of King Tutankhamun was celebrated as the most spectacular archaeological find ever made; nearly a century later, it continues to inspire awe.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

After five uneventful years working for Lord Carnarvon in the Valley of the Kings, Howard Carter struck pay dirt on November 4, 1922, with the discovery of the steps that led down into King Tutankhamun's tomb. The clearance took nearly a decade to complete. Although some categories of objects in the "treasure" (such as archery equipment, chariots, musical instruments, and model boats) have been published, the majority still await scholarly study.

RELATED HISTORIES

AKHENATEN

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

TUTANKHAMUN

reigned 1336–1327 BCE

The son (or nephew) of Akhenaten, the teenage pharaoh ruled during the 18th Dynasty

GEORGE EDWARD STANHOPE MOLYNEUX HERBERT, FIFTH EARL OF CARNARVON

1866–1923

Wealthy English gentleman and art collector; his death from an infected mosquito bite was attributed to the “curse” of the pharaoh

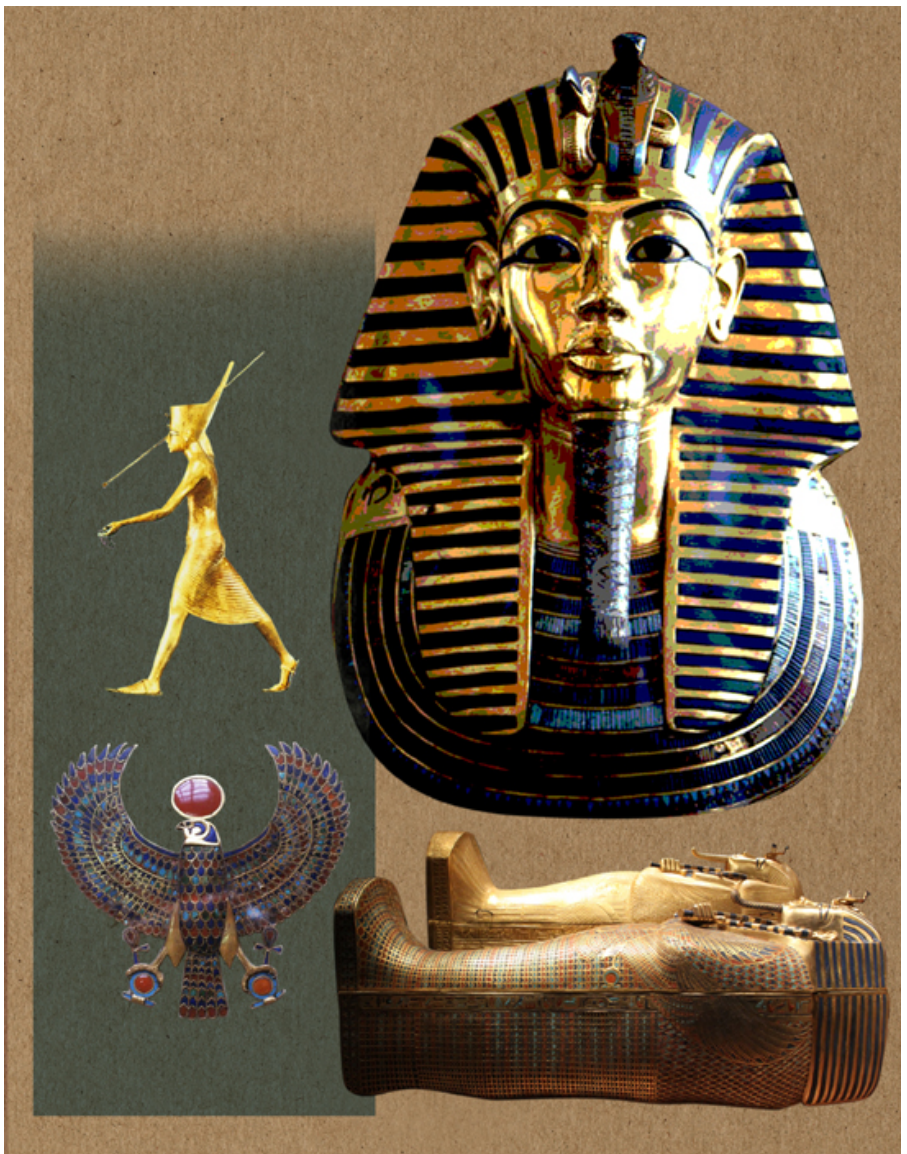
HOWARD CARTER

1874–1939

English draftsman and archaeologist

30-SECOND TEXT

M. Eaton-Krauss



Treasures found in Tutankhamun's tomb included items from his earthly life and objects intended to assist him in the afterlife.

KARNAK CACHETTE

the 30-second history

The Karnak Cachette was a deposit of about 800 stone statues and 17,000 bronzes, buried with a motley collection of other objects in a huge pit more than 49 ft. (15 m) deep in the courtyard between Pylons 7 and 8 on the north-south axis of Karnak Temple. Georges Legrain discovered it on December 26, 1903; groundwater hampered the clearance, which was not completed until June 1907. The stone statues date to a wide time span (from the Fifth Dynasty to the Ptolemaic Period), but those older than the New Kingdom are comparatively few while none are younger than the first century BCE. Statue types run the gamut from striding and seated to kneeling and prostrate figures; there are also many block statues. New Kingdom pharaohs are well represented while priests of the Karnak Temple predominate among the later sculptures. One of the few statues of women depicts Thutmose III's mother. Nearly all the bronzes are small figures of Osiris, god of the dead, which worshippers left in the temple during the Late Period. The objects were buried, all at the same time, apparently following a house-keeping action; since they had been dedicated in the temple, they could not simply be tossed out. This probably occurred in the mid-first century BCE, although a much later date (ca. 330 CE) has also been proposed.

3-SECOND SURVEY

The Karnak Cachette is not unique, but is certainly the largest deposit yet found in Egypt of statuary cleared from a temple and buried.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Before Georges Legrain died, he managed to complete three volumes of the Egyptian Museum's catalog with about one-third of the stone statues from the Cachette. Since 1917, a number of Egyptologists have studied and published additional pieces. In 2006, a joint French-Egyptian project was initiated to compile an inventory of all the finds. This resulted in the posting of a continually updated database, accessible online since November 2009, at www.ifao.egnet.net/bases/cachette

RELATED HISTORIES

TEMPLES

THUTMOSE III

OSIRIS & RESURRECTION

SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

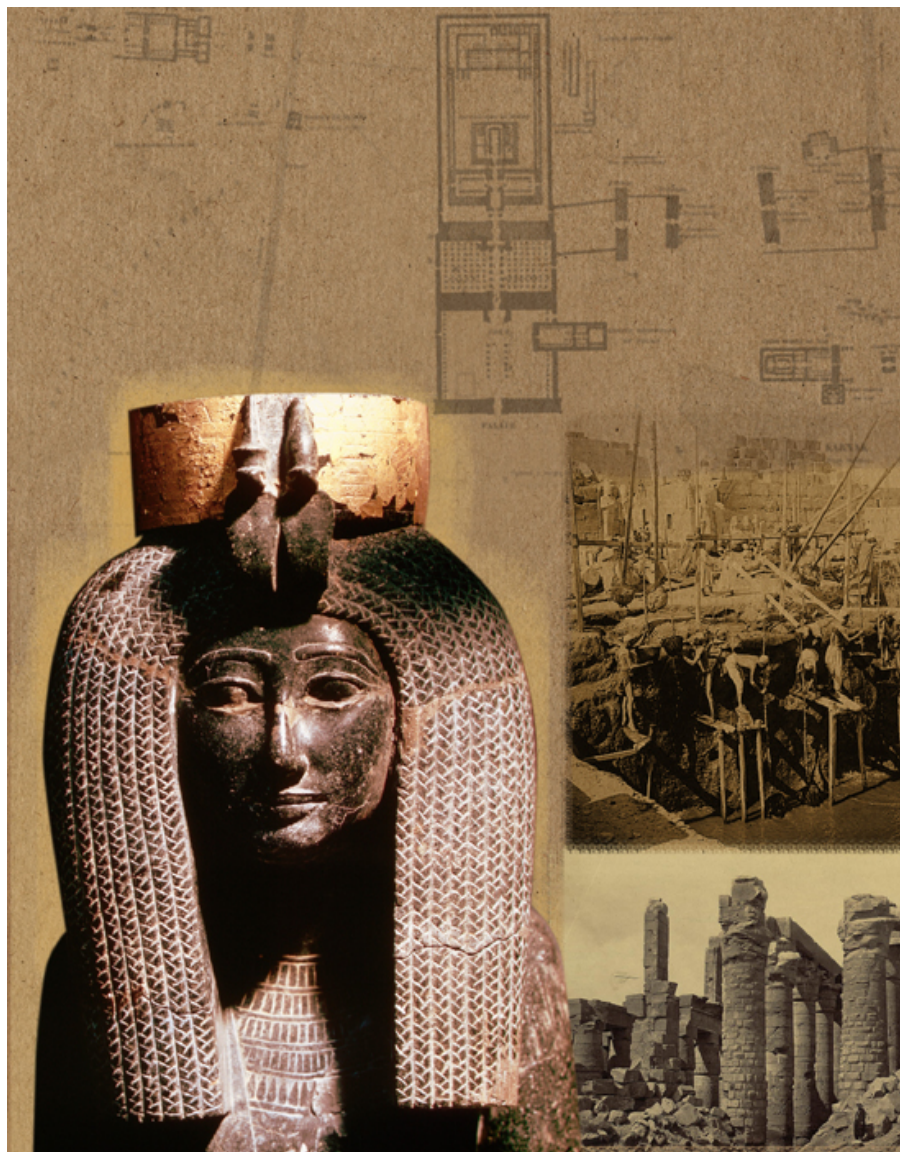
GEORGES LEGRAIN

1865–1917

French archaeologist who supervised excavations and restorations at Karnak Temple

30-SECOND TEXT

M. Eaton-Krauss



Statues discovered at the Karnak Cachette include this one of Thutmose III's mother.



SCIENCE, MEDICINE & TECHNOLOGY

SCIENCE, MEDICINE & TECHNOLOGY

GLOSSARY

adze A stone, copper, or bronze tool used to carve and shave wood. It looks similar to an ax but with a head mounted perpendicular to the handle or with the blade set at a right angle to the shaft.

akh A concept meaning “effective.” In the funerary tradition of Egypt, the *akh* was a transfigured deceased person who had full physical range in the afterlife.

canopic A vase, jar, chest, or other container that held one of the internal organs of a body removed during the mummification process. There were four canopic jars per set, one each for the liver, the stomach, the lungs, and the intestines.

decans A group of 36 rising stars, each successively marking the beginning of a new “hour” (40 minutes) for an interval of ten days.

epagomenal days Days that fall outside of any regular month in the solar calendar. The Egyptians added five extra epagomenal days to their 360-day year.

faience More correctly known as “Egyptian faience,” this blue-green glaze is a nonclay ceramic of silica made from sand or crushed quartz. It was commonly used to make jewelry, amulets, scarabs, figurines, and vessels.

lunar calendar Certain Egyptian festivals were organized around various phases of the moon. The lunar calendar marked these lunar-based events and was restricted to the cultic sphere.

Mitanni A powerful kingdom located in northern Mesopotamia. The Mitanni were a group of Indo-Aryans who united several small Hurrian-speaking states during the Late Bronze Age.

mortuary temple A temple dedicated to commemorating the cult of the deceased king and the reign of the pharaoh who commissioned its construction.

obelisk A tall, narrow, four-sided structure with a pyramid-shaped top carved out of a single stone. It had symbolic connections with the sun cult, especially the sun god Re.

Punt An ancient land thought to comprise many small states located southeast of Egypt near the coastal region of modern-day Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Sudan.

Pyramid Texts So-named because they were first discovered inscribed on the interior walls and sarcophagi of pyramids at Saqqara dating to the Fifth and Sixth Dynasties, the Pyramid Texts are the earliest set of religious texts known from ancient Egypt. They consist of a number of spells and incantations that are often difficult to interpret, but they are primarily concerned with aiding the king’s ascent to the afterlife.

scriptorium A place for writing. In ancient Egypt, this place was called the “House of Life.” It is thought that scribes copied and recorded manuscripts here and that it acted as a library for papyrus scrolls, as well as a classroom to teach scribes and priests.

shabti Also known as *ushebti*. A funerary figurine placed in tombs as part of the grave goods to act as a substitute for the deceased in the afterlife by performing manual labor tasks. Many were inscribed with the name of their owner and an *ushebti* spell.

shadow clock A device used in daylight to measure the hours of the day by the position of the sun.

The device, which cast its shadow to mark the hour, divided the day into ten parts plus two twilight hours in the morning and evening to make a 12-hour day.

solar bark A ceremonial vessel used during rituals and festival processions to transport the portable image of the sun god.

star clock The method of using stars to measure time. In ancient Egypt, star clocks occur as tables of decanal stars on the interior lids of coffins of the Ninth and Tenth Dynasties. The tables would be viewed under the night sky and the position of a specific star in the table would determine the time.

stela A standing stone or wooden tablet used to mark a tomb or boundary that was normally decorated with inscriptions, reliefs, or paintings. Stelae could also be used as votive monuments set up by individuals to worship gods or as commemorative monuments to record special events.

water clock Also called clepsydra. Water clocks were introduced in the New Kingdom to determine the hours of the day. They were shaped like vases and had a scale on the inside with a small needle-size hole in the bottom, where water could escape when the vases were filled. As the water drained, hours were measured against the scale.

MEDICINE

the 30-second history

Egyptian medical knowledge was limited. Only some bodily functions were understood, such as the circulatory system. Physicians performed surgery; one famous papyrus is a trauma surgeon's handbook, probably for the battlefield. Nonsurgical treatments include medication but also magical procedures. The Ebers papyrus treats internal diseases and medical theory. Other papyri focus on gynecology or the diagnosis and treatment of snakebites. The medical profession comprised ordinary and specialized physicians (such as ophthalmologists and dentists). While Egyptians usually could rely on a sufficient diet, poor hygienic conditions contributed to a dramatic mortality rate. One-third of all newborns died within the first months, and half of all children did not live beyond their youth. Some of the known illnesses were diarrhea, amoebic dysentery, typhus, malaria, tuberculosis, smallpox, pneumonic plague, polio, schistosomiasis, hepatitis, illnesses caused by worms, conjunctivitis, diphtheria, dermatological conditions, and tumors. Also well attested are fractures of all kinds, and injuries to the skull and spinal column. Because the flour used in bread was ground coarsely and mixed with sand, teeth were often worn down to the nerve, which could lead to painful abscesses. However, there is hardly any evidence for cavities.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Ancient Egyptian medicine was famed abroad, from the Hittites to the Greeks. However, the efficacy of their medical practices very often finds no support in modern science.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Egypt's climate and the Egyptian technique of mummification have preserved thousands of bodies that are an invaluable source for our understanding of health, disease, and living conditions in ancient Egypt. Noninvasive investigation and visualization methods have replaced actual autopsies and increased significantly our knowledge, as has the detection of many pathogens. However, the collection and analysis of DNA samples is still problematic.

RELATED HISTORIES

ETHNICITY & POPULATION

MUMMIFICATION

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

IMHOTEP

reign of Djoser 2630–2611 BCE

Architect of the Step Pyramid of Djoser at Saqqara, in the first millennium BCE worshipped as a god of healing

EDWIN SMITH

1822–1906

Collector of antiquities who purchased the medical papyrus named after him in 1862

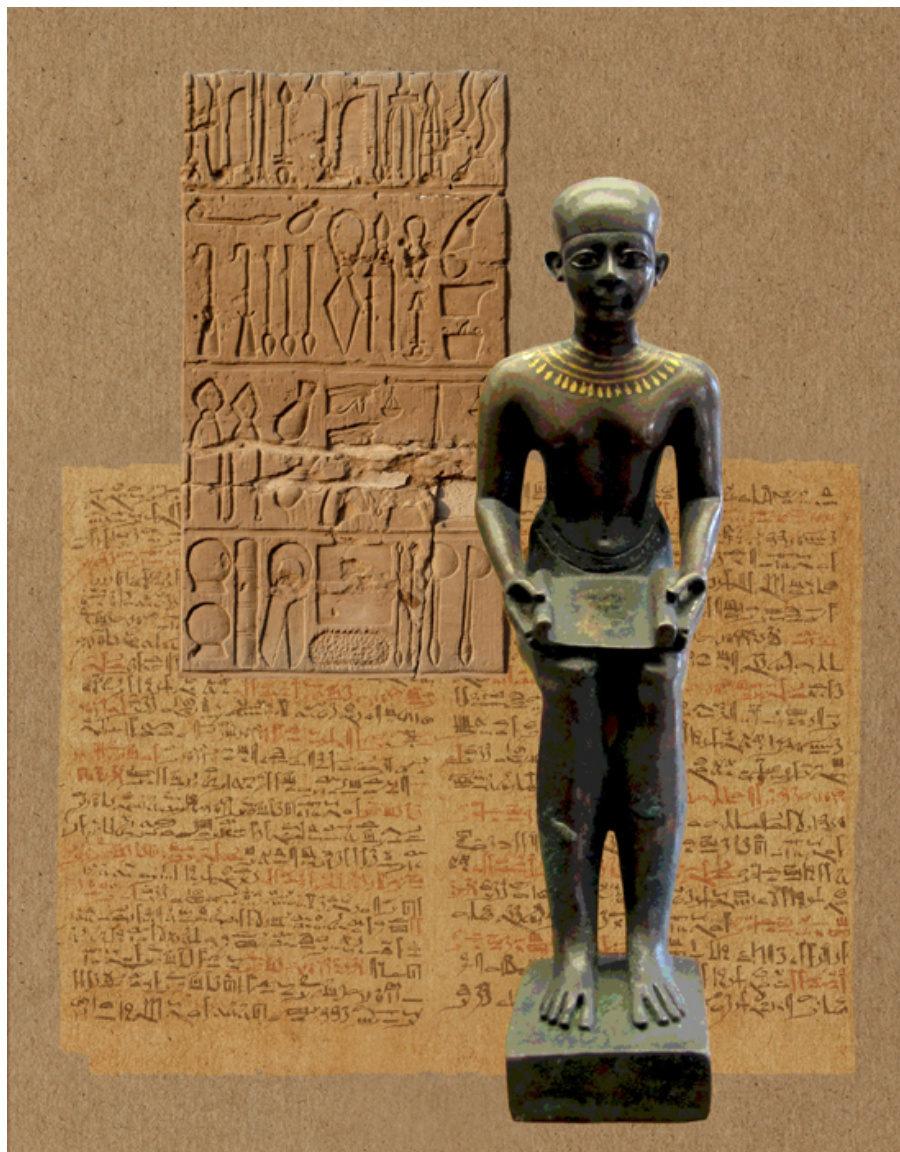
WOLFHART WESTENDORF

1924–

German Egyptologist and scholar of ancient Egyptian medicine

30-SECOND TEXT

Thomas Schneider



Papyrus and wall carvings record medical treatments and tools. Imhotep was the god of healing.

MAGIC

the 30-second history

Magic (personified as the god Heka, the son of the creator god, who helped his father construct the cosmos) was fundamental to every aspect of ancient Egyptian society: religious, political, scientific, and agricultural. Amulets, wands, effigies, and other paraphernalia were used, together with oral and written spells and rituals, to heal illness, induce divine visions, encourage the productivity of crops, safeguard livestock from wild animals, and aid deceased individuals in their journeys through the afterlife. The same magical precepts were used to protect newborn babies from disease-carrying demons, ordinary laborers from snakebites and scorpion stings, and the sun god on his nightly voyage when he was attacked by a monstrous serpent intent on blotting out the sun forever. Spells could be employed to make someone fall in love or to curse a hated rival. They could also be used to protect the entire country (and its king) from dangerous enemies and to subjugate foreign lands. Magical knowledge was closely guarded; the temple priests acted as private magicians in towns and villages and also as royal court magicians for the pharaoh. They possessed the education and access to these arcane rites, which were composed and stored in the temple scriptorium (the “House of Life”).

3-SECOND SURVEY

The term “magic” has negative connotations in modern Western society; however, it was not only legal and accepted, but also highly valued and integral to ancient Egyptian civilization.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

An intact “magician’s box” was discovered in a Middle Kingdom tomb shaft, buried beneath the later mortuary temple of Ramesses II. It contained a number of papyri inscribed with medical prescriptions and fertility spells, divine hymns, exorcism rites, funerary and cultic rituals, and incantations for protective amulets. It also included ivory wands used to draw protective circles, figurines and human hair for coercive magic (such as love spells), divine statues, amulets, and other magical items.

RELATED HISTORIES

MEDICINE

CREATION MYTHS

MORTUARY TEXTS

30-SECOND TEXT

Rachel Aronin



Magic, in the form of amulets and effigies, was part of everyday life in ancient Egypt. The god Heka personified this magical power.

TRANSPORTATION

the 30-second history

The Nile River was not only a lifeline for agriculture; it was also the superhighway of ancient Egypt. The Egyptians devised watercraft for virtually any need—from tiny skiffs for private conveyance and fishing, to broad transport ships for military and trading campaigns. Seafaring boats are evidenced as early as the Old Kingdom, though cruising close to the coastline was probably the rule until later. Access to the Red or Mediterranean seas required land transport of boat components for assembly near a port. The intractable desert sands made wheeled vehicles impractical, so for land-based transportation, travel on-foot or by donkey was most effective. Donkeys were favored pack animals for both short- and long-distance movement of goods. Cattle power was also enlisted for pulling heavy loads. Widespread use of wheeled, animal-drawn carts became common only around the New Kingdom. Whereas land movement of monumentally heavy loads such as construction blocks and colossal statuary, was negotiated with wooden sleds, river barges could float cargo as big as a whole obelisk. Of world-changing significance, the introduction of the horse and chariot from western Asia in the Second Intermediate Period paved the way for Egypt's rise as the supreme Near Eastern imperial power during the New Kingdom.

3-SECOND SURVEY

The ancient Egyptians faced a formidable landscape, but throughout history they proved adept at mastering their environment to reach and surpass intended destinations.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Some distant lands were special destinations. From Old through New Kingdom times, Egyptian expeditions traveled to Punt, a source of highly desired exotic goods—especially incense for temple rituals. Reachable via land or by sea, its exact location is debated, but current consensus favors eastern Eritrea and Sudan. Queen Hatshepsut's mortuary temple at Deir el-Bahari chronicles the most famous expedition, depicting a fleet of large, complexly rigged trade ships at various stages of their mission.

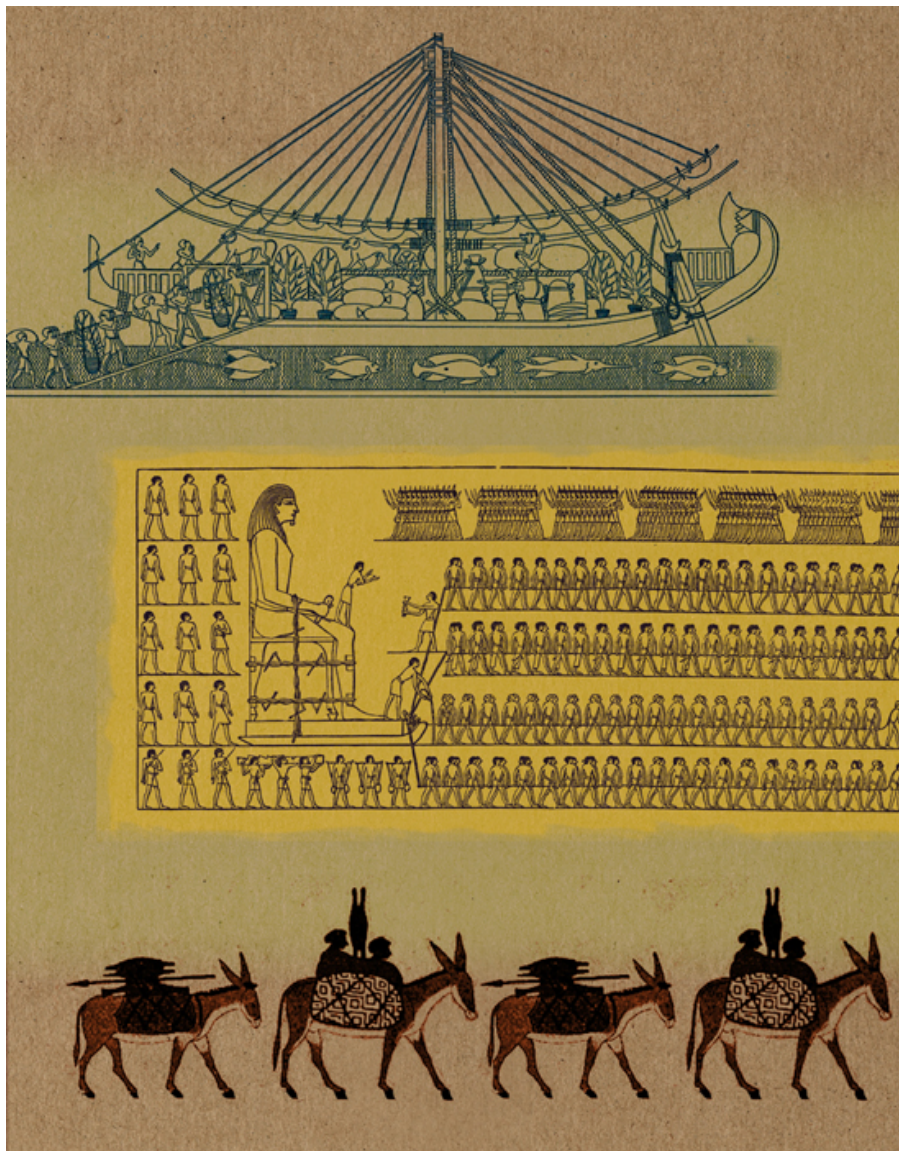
RELATED HISTORIES

THE DESERT & THE OASES

EGYPT'S NEIGHBORS

CONSTRUCTION

THE MILITARY



The **Nile** was vital to travel in ancient Egypt. Transport by land was more difficult, but donkeys were useful for moving goods. Giant sculptures could be moved by organized teams of laborers.

MATHEMATICS & ASTRONOMY

the 30-second history

Because only a few sources have been preserved, such as the Mathematical Papyrus Rhind and the Moscow Mathematical Papyrus, our knowledge of Egyptian mathematics is sketchy, but it seems that it was mainly applied to land administration and architecture. We have evidence of the basic arithmetic operations: use of a decimal system; use of fractions; calculation of surfaces and volumes (the surface of a circle with an approximate value for π of 3.16, the surface of a hemisphere, the volume of a truncated pyramid); summing of progressions, equations, reciprocals; and knowledge of Pythagorean triples. Astronomy devised a civil calendar of 365 days (12 months of 30 days and five epagomenal days), and a lunar calendar for religious feasts. Star clocks from the Ninth and Tenth Dynasties contain tables of the decans and when they rose in the night sky, which allowed for the determination of precise hours. In the New Kingdom, water clocks were introduced as an auxiliary device for this purpose; late New Kingdom royal tombs show grids of transiting stars behind a seated priest. Shadow clocks were used to measure daylight hours. From the New Kingdom onward, tomb and temple ceilings were decorated with complex depictions of star constellations in the form of animals and anthropomorphic deities.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Egyptian mathematics and astronomy served mainly practical purposes in administration and architecture, with a number of significant achievements in arithmetic and geometry.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Astronomical concepts were central to ideas about the king's afterlife. According to the Pyramid Texts, the king journeyed like the sun god across the heavens, or became a star among two constellations. Among the southern "unwearying stars" that move far across the celestial sphere (Orion's Belt and Sirius), he would become Osiris (Orion), whereas Sirius was identified with Osiris's wife Isis. Or, he would join the "imperishable stars," the northern circumpolar stars that never sink below the horizon (Big Dipper, Little Dipper, Draco).

RELATED HISTORIES

CONSTRUCTION

OSIRIS & RESURRECTION

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

AMENEMHAB

ca. 1500 BCE

Ancient Egyptian astronomer, inventor of a water clock

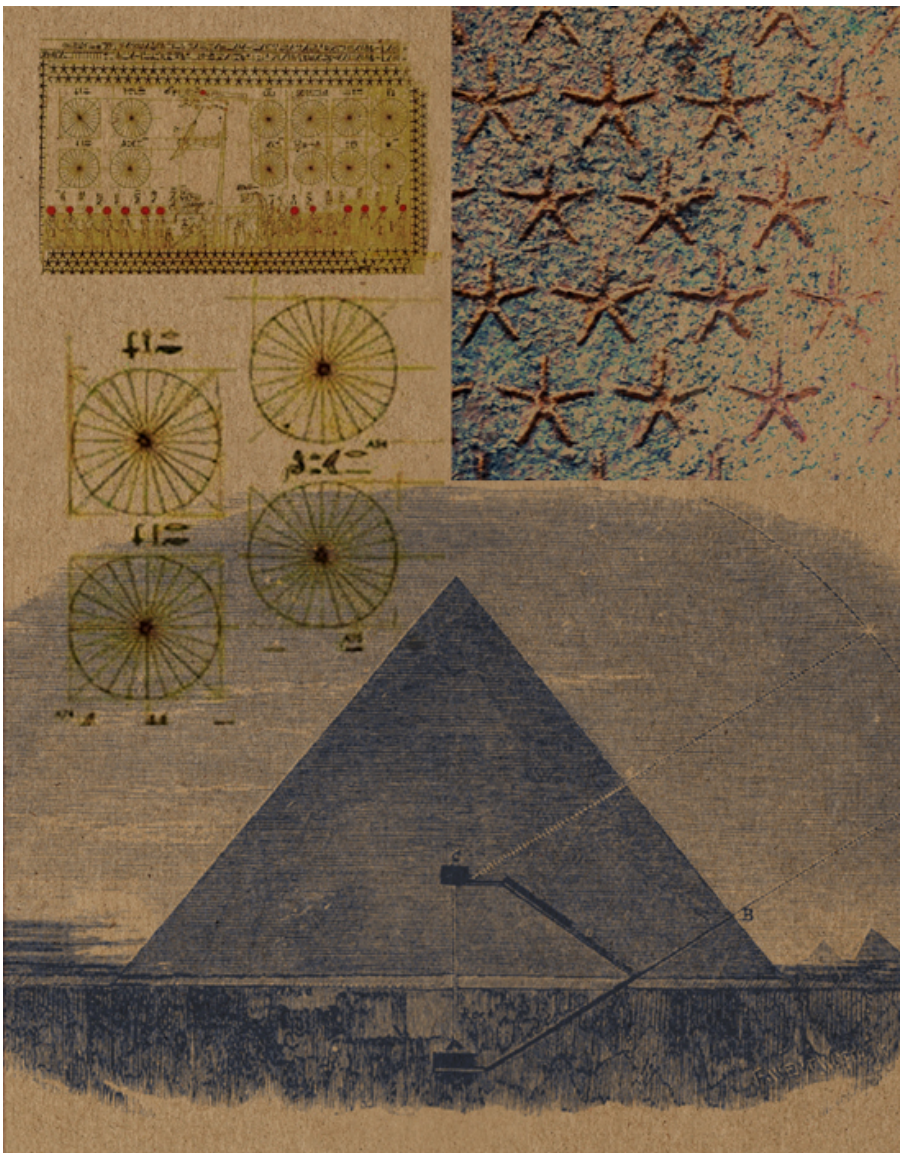
RICHARD A. PARKER

1903–1995

Egyptologist and pioneer of the study of Egyptian astronomy

30-SECOND TEXT

Thomas Schneider



Mathematics was applied to architecture, assisting with the development of the pyramid. Star clocks enabled the Egyptians to determine the hours.

THUTMOSE III

Did Thutmose III have a Napoleon complex, or did Napoleon have a Thutmose III complex? Both men built extraordinary empires for their countries. Son of Thutmose II and a minor queen named Isis, this fifth king of the 18th Dynasty spent his first 20 regnal years (from 1479 BCE) overshadowed by his aunt, Queen Hatshepsut. After her death in ca. 1458 BCE, Thutmose embarked on at least 16 Asiatic military campaigns over two decades, the most famous of which was the conquest and siege of Megiddo (years 22–23), part of a coalition of Syrian rebel towns. A clever surprise strategy, followed by a long siege, secured the victory. This and other triumphs are recorded in the king's Annals at Karnak Temple, our most detailed journal accounts of Egyptian military exploits in Syria. By year 33 the king had crossed the Euphrates, defeated the Mitanni, and erected a stela to commemorate the feat. Another success subdued Kadesh on the Orontes River (year 42), where Thutmose's officer, Amenemheb, slaughtered a mare sent out to distract the Egyptian chariotry stallions. To Egypt's south, Thutmose eventually reached as far as the Fourth Cataract of the Nile.

The Egyptian sphere of influence had never been so expansive, and the tribute and booty flowed back home to support the king's ambitious construction program. At Karnak, his Akh-menu, or jubilee temple, contained a hall of ancestors demonstrating Thutmose's veneration of the past; for all, that is, except for Hatshepsut, whose name he started to erase—for reasons still unclear—after his forty-second year. The temple also contained the unique “Botanical Garden” chambers, with reliefs documenting the flora and fauna encountered by the army during its Syrian campaigns. At least 50 other temples and shrines by Thutmose are attested in Egypt as well as in Palestine and Nubia. Across the river from Karnak, Thutmose erected his mortuary temple, along with shrines at Deir el-Bahari (containing reliefs from his final decade) and Medinet Habu.

Stylistically, only the later portraits of Thutmose III can be clearly differentiated from those of Hatshepsut. His son Amenhotep II, coregent with his father for several years, continued some of the military traditions of his father. After 53 years on the throne, Thutmose was finally laid to rest in a sumptuous tomb high in the cliff in the Valley of the Kings, but his mummy was later moved to a secret cache near Deir el-Bahari; he rests today in the Cairo Museum, one of Egypt's mightiest pharaohs.



MUMMIFICATION

the 30-second history

“The akh-spirit is bound for the sky, while the corpse is bound for the earth.” This Pyramid Texts spell demonstrates ancient Egyptians were fully aware of the differences between the spiritual and the corporeal aspects of human beings. They preserved corpses so that after death the nonmaterial components, which remained animated, could reunite with the body that lay inside the tomb. After centuries of trial and error, embalming techniques reached their peak in the New Kingdom. The first step was the removal of the internal organs—lungs, liver, intestines, and stomach—through an incision in the lower left side of the abdomen. These were mummified separately and kept in containers called canopic jars. The heart was left in the body and the brain discarded. The body cavity was then washed and packed with natron, a mixture of sodium carbonate and sodium bicarbonate, which helped desiccate the body, and the entire body immersed in a natron bath for 40 days. The next step was to wash the body cavity with aromatic oils, replenish the natron, and cover the body with resin, which protected it from insects and bacteria. This phase lasted 30 days. Finally, the body was wrapped in bandages, within which were inserted protective amulets, according to rigorous religious specifications.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Mummification was the artificial preservation of the body arising from the belief that it would reunite with its spiritual counterparts in the afterlife.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

The elaborate embalming method described herein was reserved for the wealthy. The ancient Greek historian Herodotus describes another method for those who “wished to avoid expense.” Cedar oil was injected into the body cavity, and the corpse then immersed in a bed of natron for 70 days. The oil would liquefy the internal organs, which were allowed to pour out from the desiccated body.

RELATED HISTORIES

DEIR EL-BAHARI ROYAL MUMMIES

MEDICINE

OSIRIS & RESURRECTION

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

HERODOTUS

ca. 484–420 BCE

Greek historian

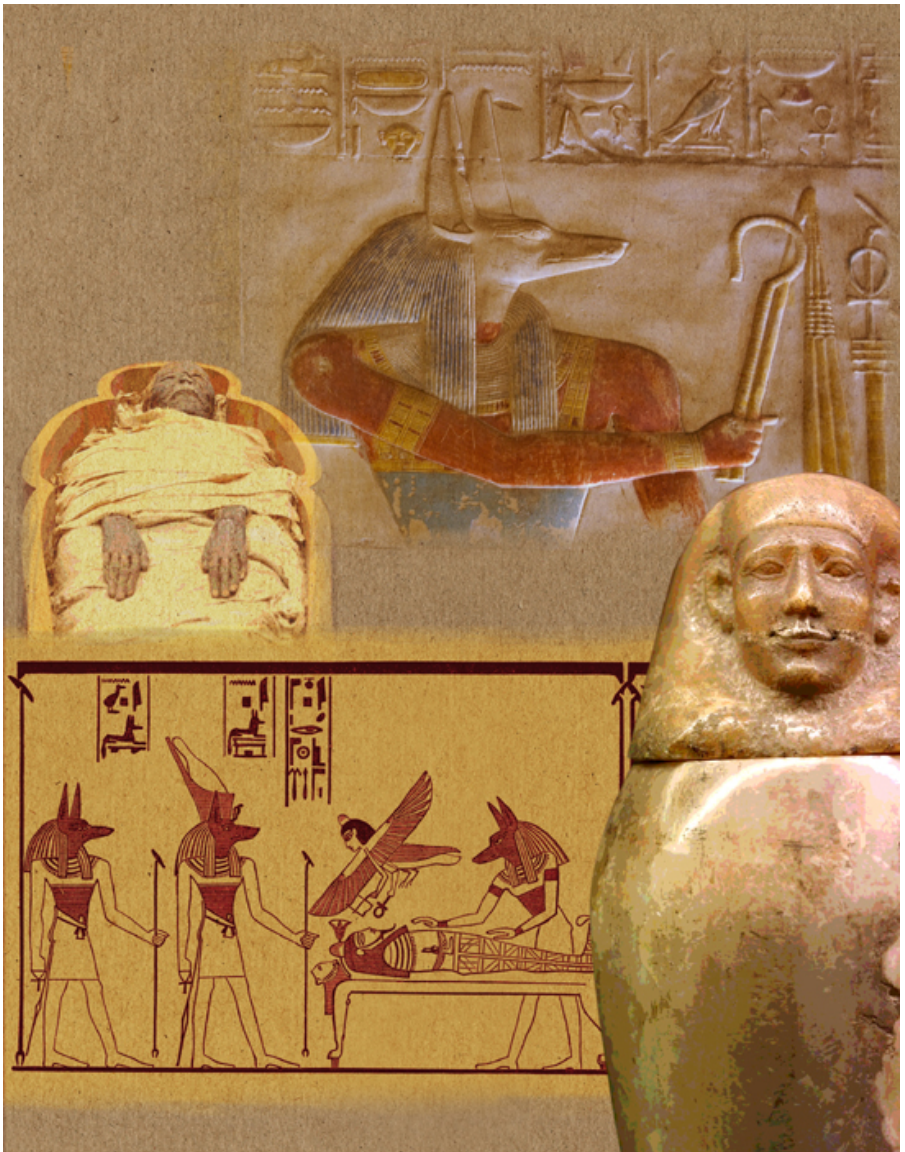
SALIMA IKRAM

1965–

Egyptologist, American University in Cairo

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



The jackal-headed deity Anubis was associated with embalming and mummification, having wrapped Osiris's body.

TOOLS & CRAFTS

the 30-second history

Using stone, copper, and bronze tools, the Egyptians became proficient at working many stones, woods, and metals. Stonemasons and sculptors used picks, axes, and pounders of hard stone alongside copper saws, chisels, and drills to quarry and smooth stone construction blocks for temples and tombs and shape vessels, statues, and sarcophagi. With similar tools, woodworkers felled trees and cut boards, which shipwrights used to build large transport and ceremonial boats, like the famous solar bark found next to the Great Pyramid at Giza. Skilled carpenters fashioned wooden furniture, boxes, models, etc., with copper or bronze adzes, a tool so important that it became incorporated at an early date into the “Opening of the Mouth” ritual to (re)animate statues and mummies. Vessels and statuettes, for both tomb and temple use, were constructed from common and precious metals. Leatherworkers employed metal scrapers, knives, awls, pins, and needles for making sandals and garments, straps/lashes, and chariot and military equipment, as did garment makers for cutting and sewing everyday attire such as linen dresses and kilts. Specialized metal implements were also used by butchers, barbers, physicians, farmers, soldiers, and other workers.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Tomb reliefs frequently depict informative scenes of a wide variety of craftsmen engaged in their trades, as well as their tools, methods, and finished products.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Pottery vessels (formed by hand or made on potters’ wheels) comprised the most ubiquitous type of manufactured good, used for preparing, serving, and storing food, drink, and other commodities, as well as for ceremonial uses. Faience, a nonclay ceramic that could be colored and glazed, was fired in molds to produce amulets (including scarabs), inlays for jewelry and furniture, and funerary shabti figurines. Copper-rich glazes provided faience with its characteristic blue-green coloring, imitating costly turquoise and lapis lazuli.

RELATED HISTORIES

CONSTRUCTION

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND

MINOR ARTS

30-SECOND TEXT

Rachel Aronin



Each trade had its own specialized tools. Pottery was one of the most prolific crafts in ancient Egypt, and potters' wheels became increasingly sophisticated pieces of equipment.



THOUGHT & BELIEF

THOUGHT & BELIEF

GLOSSARY

amulet A small item that protects its owner from danger or harm. It could be carried or worn in a necklace, bracelet, or ring and was also placed among a mummy's bandages to protect the deceased in the afterlife.

Book of the Dead A funerary text composed during the New Kingdom. It consisted of spells that were designed for provision, to protect, and to guide the deceased on their journey to the netherworld.

cartonnage Comprising layers of linen or papyrus covered with plaster, cartonnage was the material used to create coffins and funerary masks from the First Intermediate Period onward.

Coffin Texts So-named because they were first found inscribed in the interior of elite wooden coffins during the First Intermediate Period and Middle Kingdom, the Coffin Texts emphasize a reunion with loved ones in the afterlife and provide spells as maps with passwords and keys to overcome the difficulties on the path to the netherworld.

crook and flail Two of the most prominent items (scepters) of royal regalia. They were symbols of Egyptian kingship and dominion. The crook was a cane with a hooked handle and the flail was a rod with three attached beaded strands.

demurge A figure responsible for fashioning and maintaining the physical universe. The concept derives from Platonic philosophy.

Instructions Also known as instructional literature, Wisdom Texts, or didactic literature. A genre of texts (called *sebayt* in Egyptian) that often incorporates the teachings of a father for his son. Such texts advise on all aspects of personal and professional behavior.

Intermediate period A time characterized by political unrest and the decentralization of the central administration. There were three intermediate periods in Egyptian history.

Middle Egypt The geographic region defined by modern archaeologists as stretching between Cairo and the Qena Bend.

Middle Kingdom (2040–1640 BCE; Dynasties 11–13) A period of political unity when art, architecture, literature, and religion flourished. During this time, a middle class arose, and ordinary individuals gained access to funerary privileges once only accessed by royals.

necropolis A term meaning “city of the dead,” referring to a large ancient burial site.

New Kingdom (1550–1070 BCE; Dynasties 18–20). The age of the Egyptian Empire. The period is marked by extensive building projects and military campaigns.

Old Kingdom (2649–2100 BCE; Dynasties 3–8) A period of economic prosperity and political stability that also marked the beginning of large state-organized building projects, such as the Step Pyramid at Saqqara and the Great Pyramid at Giza.

papyrus Made from the pith of the papyrus plant, this paperlike material became the most common medium for Egyptian writing.

Pyramid Texts So-named because they were first discovered inscribed on the interior walls and

sarcophagi of pyramids at Saqqara dating to the Fifth and Sixth dynasties, the Pyramid Texts are the earliest set of religious texts known from ancient Egypt. They consist of a number of spells and incantations that are often difficult to interpret, but are primarily concerned with aiding the king's ascent to the afterlife.

sarcophagus A container used to protect a mummified body, generally made of stone.

scarab An amulet in the form of a scarab beetle, associated with certain aspects of the sun god. Scarabs were generally inscribed on the bottom and were often incorporated into jewelry or used as administrative seals.

shabti Also known as ushebti. A funerary figurine placed in tombs as part of the grave goods to act as a substitute for the deceased in the afterlife by performing manual labor tasks. Many were inscribed with the name of their owner and an ushebti spell.

sphinx A mythical creature with the body of a lion and the head of a man (or in some cases a ram), which often wore the royal nemes headdress. In Egypt, the most famous sphinx is the Great Sphinx at Giza.

uraeus A protective cobra deity whose image protruded above the forehead on royal crowns and acted as a symbol of kingship.

CREATION MYTHS

the 30-second history

Egyptian creation myths attempted to explain the origins of the natural, divine, and social realms. They were not monolithic; many cities had their own versions, which were adapted and retold for millennia. There were some commonalities: before the creation act, there was an infinite, formless, watery darkness (often personified as the primeval deity Nun), out of which emerged the self-generated demiurge. This divine architect fashioned other deities, who helped him form the world and establish order. The key variations between myths involved the identity of the creator(s)—he was usually the main deity of the city—and the processes by which he brought about creation. In Heliopolis, the sun god Re-Atum begat the first divine couple by masturbation. They introduced sexual reproduction, by which three other pairs of gods came into being (personifying earth, sky, and the natural world, as well as kingship, chaos, and other societal entities). In Hermopolis, four divine couples resided in the primordial waters and fashioned the world together, thereafter causing the sun to rise and the Nile to flow. Attempts were made to unite these two major genesis myths by having the Hermopolitan deities create the sun god, who then emerged from the waters to produce the rest of the universe.

3-SECOND SURVEY

The ancient Egyptians devised a number of differing but complementary mythological accounts of the creation of the cosmos and society and the beginnings of life.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

A later, perhaps more sophisticated creation account originated in the capital city of Memphis, casting the local god Ptah as supreme creator. Instead of rising from the waters of Nun or generating life from semen, blood, or tears, Ptah envisioned the cosmos in his mind and then spoke it into being. He did this with the aid of Sia and Hu, deities representing his divine intellect and creative utterance, and the god of magic, Heka.

RELATED HISTORIES

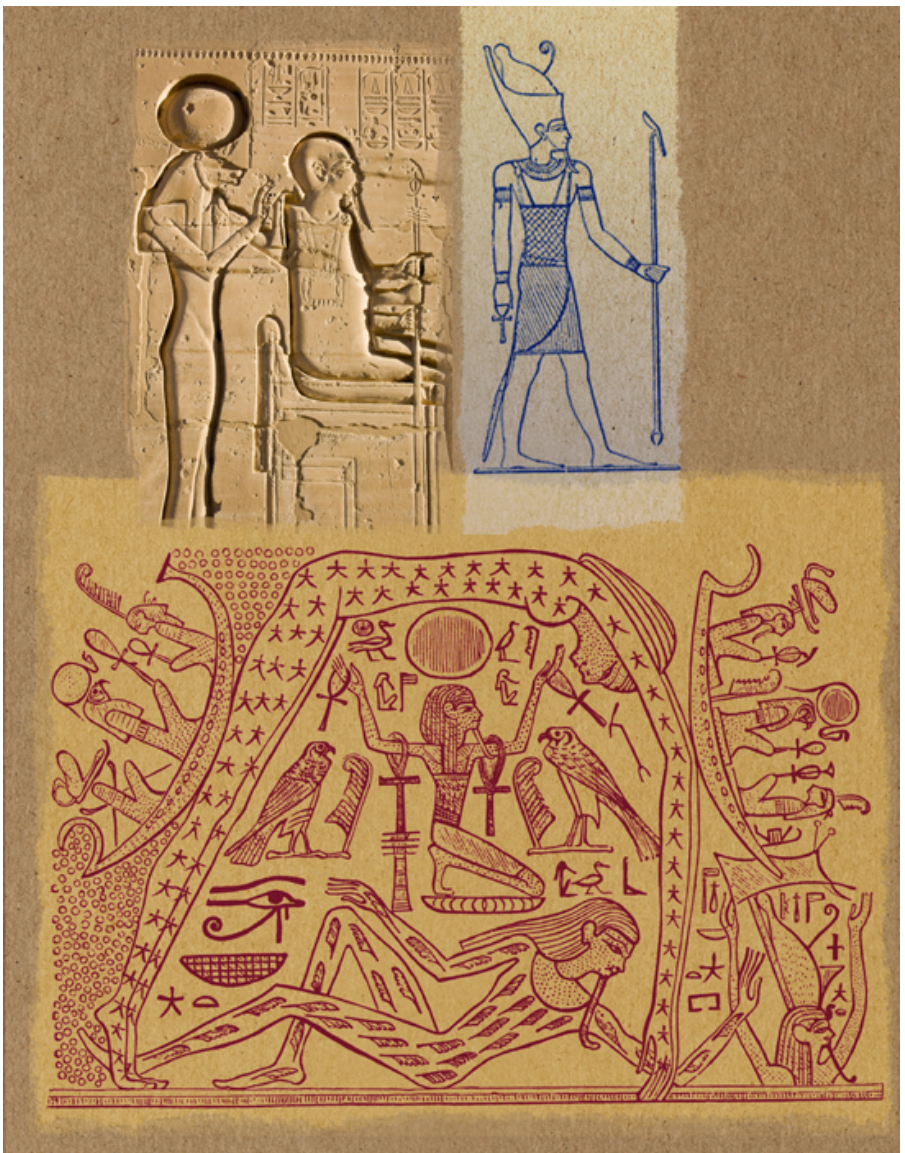
MAGIC

RE, THE SUN GOD

MORTUARY TEXTS

30-SECOND TEXT

Rachel Aronin



The Egyptians had several creator gods, including Ptah (seated, top left) and Re-Atum (top right). The gods of the Heliopolitan myth represented earth, the sky, and nature.

RE, THE SUN GOD

the 30-second history

If ancient Egyptians had one divinity more powerful than any others, it was the sun god. He took three forms: the scarab-shaped Khepri was the rising sun, the sun disk Re was the midday sun, and the anthropomorphic Atum was the setting sun. In some accounts, Atum was believed to be the creator of gods and men, while his emergence as a phoenix on a mound or a child in a lotus flower at the dawn of time signified the appearance of light in the world. He was said to travel through the day sky in a barque. At night, the ram-headed Re traveled through the underworld, attended by a divine crew that kept dangers away. To strengthen their own gods' prestige, local theologians merged them with Re to create a new divinity whose name was compounded with that of the sun god; thus were Amun-Re and Re-Horakhty formulated. In the Fourth Dynasty, the phrase "son of Re" was introduced in the royal titulary to establish a link between the king and the sun god. In the 14th century BCE, King Akhenaten brought the importance of the solar disk—the Aten—close to a monotheistic type of worship, but his religious revolution did not survive him.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Re was a solar god primarily worshipped at ancient Iunu, "Pillar Town," a city the Greeks called Heliopolis, "City of the Sun."

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Like many people in history, the ancient Egyptians told a story of a demiurge angry at his creation because of its rebellious ways. Re sends a goddess to punish mankind. After a day of slaughter, Re reconsiders destroying his creation entirely and so he tricks the goddess by spreading 7,000 jars of red-colored beer over the earth. Seeing the land covered in what looks like blood, she drinks the beer, falls asleep, and mankind survives.

RELATED HISTORIES

CREATION MYTHS

AKHENATEN

AMUN

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

AKHENATEN

reigned 1352–1336 BCE

King of Egypt

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



The sun god's forms included a scarab and a hawk-headed figure wearing a sun disk headdress.

OSIRIS & RESURRECTION

the 30-second history

The god Osiris was identified as a deceased king, depicted as mummified and wearing a crown, holding the royal emblems of the crook and flail. His primary domains were fertility—signified by greenish skin—and death. He was the son of Geb (Earth) and Nut (Sky) at the time of creation, a member of the first divine generation with humanlike forms and behaviors. His jealous brother Seth murdered him and dismembered his body, scattering his parts across Egypt. Osiris’s sister/wife, Isis, and their sister, Nephthys, scoured the country, recovering all the body parts except Osiris’ genitals, which were eaten by a fish in the Nile. With Osiris nearly whole again, Isis (through magic) resurrected him and (through use of a false phallus) conceived their son, the falcon-headed god, Horus. Horus fought Seth over the right to Osiris’ throne, ultimately winning and establishing a divine model for father-to-son royal succession. Osiris adjourned to become ruler of the underworld, where he assumed the role of judge of deceased Egyptians wishing to enter the next life. Although originally only kings could associate with Osiris, eventually this applied to everyone. Mummification refashioned a corpse in Osiris’s image, keeping it whole and instilling everyone with the capabilities of “an Osiris” through rebirth in the afterlife.

3-SECOND SURVEY

A model for royal succession and for succeeding to the afterlife, Osiris was one of the most successful Egyptian deities.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

By the late Middle Kingdom, widespread popularity of Osiris peaked. Religious tradition proclaimed the god himself was buried at Abydos in an early royal tomb that, in actuality, belonged to King Djoser of the First Dynasty. Abydos became the destination of a major religious pilgrimage. Yearly festivals commemorated the god with ritual, theatrical reenactments of his story beginning at his temple and processing to his supposed tomb.

RELATED HISTORIES

PHARAOH

MUMMIFICATION

CREATION MYTHS

MORTUARY TEXTS

30-SECOND TEXT

Nicholas Picardo



Associated with death, resurrection, and fertility, Osiris (top left) was one of the principal gods of ancient Egypt. His son, the falcon-headed Horus (bottom), was the god of the sky and embodied divine kingship.

AKHENATEN

Monogamist, monotheist, pacifist—all inaccurate terms used at one time or another to describe Egypt's "heretic" king.

Akhenaten succeeded his father Amenhotep III in ca. 1352 BCE and was known as Amenhotep IV. His principal wife Nefertiti bore him six daughters; with his "other wife" Kiya, he sired another daughter. Whether either woman (or an as yet anonymous spouse) produced a male heir is not known.

On his accession to the throne, Amenhotep IV commissioned reliefs at Karnak Temple, the state god Amun's cult center at Thebes, to honor the sun god Re-Horakhty in his traditional guise as a falcon-headed man. But soon a new icon was created to express the king's solar theology, focusing on the sun disk Aten. In the new icon, sunbeams end in hands that caress the royal couple and proffer the sign of life to them as sole intermediaries between Aten and humankind. Simultaneously, a radical change in depicting the king and queen was made: they now had elongated faces with slitlike eyes and hanging chins, spindly limbs, and swelling hips and thighs.

Around his fourth regnal year, Amenhotep IV changed his name to Akhenaten ("Beneficial-for-Aten"). In the fifth year he founded a new capital city, today called Tell el-Amarna, in Middle Egypt, where depictions of the king and his family became more traditional as the reign progressed. The presence of the army and police was ubiquitous at the new capital. Abroad, Akhenaten pursued a foreign policy similar to his father's. Both deployed troops in Nubia to secure Egypt's southern border, and both sought to keep Egypt's rivals to the northeast at bay with diplomacy, as correspondence between the main players, discovered at Amarna toward the end of the 19th century, demonstrates.

At some point during Akhenaten's reign, he instituted an iconoclastic campaign against Amun and a few other deities closely associated with the god and with Thebes. Throughout Egypt, Amun's name and figures were desecrated. Akhenaten's attitude toward other gods outside Thebes is best described as indifferent.

The cult of the sun god as envisioned by Akhenaten did not survive him. Events surrounding his death and the beginning of his proscription are unclear. Did a man and/or a woman (perhaps Nefertiti or a daughter) succeed him before Tutankhamun ascended the throne? What is clear is that Amun was reinstated as King of the Gods, and by the time of Ramesses II, Akhenaten was branded a criminal.



AMUN

the 30-second history

Amun, “the hidden one,” is mentioned in the oldest Egyptian religious texts, but his cult first came to prominence in the Middle Kingdom. His origins are disputed, but a connection to the solar cult of Ra at Heliopolis is assured: labels for the earliest depictions of him read Amun-Re. In art, Amun assumed two very different guises: striding forward confidently like a king, suiting his status as King of the Gods, but also standing shrouded, his erect phallus sticking out, as befits a fertility god. His blue skin color, like the pair of falcon feathers atop his caplike crown, is appropriate for a sky god. Amun shared this headgear with a few kings, but unlike them, he never sported a uraeus cobra at his brow. Amun had two consorts: Amunet (a feminized version of his name), and Mut (Mother) who came to prominence in New Kingdom times. Amun, Mut, and their son, the moon god Khonsu, formed a typically Egyptian divine triad. Amun was often depicted as a ram, especially in Nubia. Statues of recumbent rams or ram-headed sphinxes regularly flanked the processional avenues approaching his temples. Amun’s oracle at Karnak was the most famous in Egypt, having given first Hatshepsut and then Thutmose III the nod to ascend the throne.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Amun, a relative latecomer, eventually occupied the pinnacle of the Egyptian pantheon. His cult and priesthood, centered in Thebes at Karnak Temple, reaped the benefits of empire in the New Kingdom.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Amun came to prominence when Mentuhotep II founded the Middle Kingdom. Excavations of the king’s funerary temple at western Thebes revealed some of the earliest known depictions of Amun. In the Third Intermediate Period, Amun’s priesthood established a theocracy in Upper Egypt to rival the pharaohs in the Delta.

RELATED HISTORIES

THUTMOSE III

AKHENATEN

RAMSES II

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

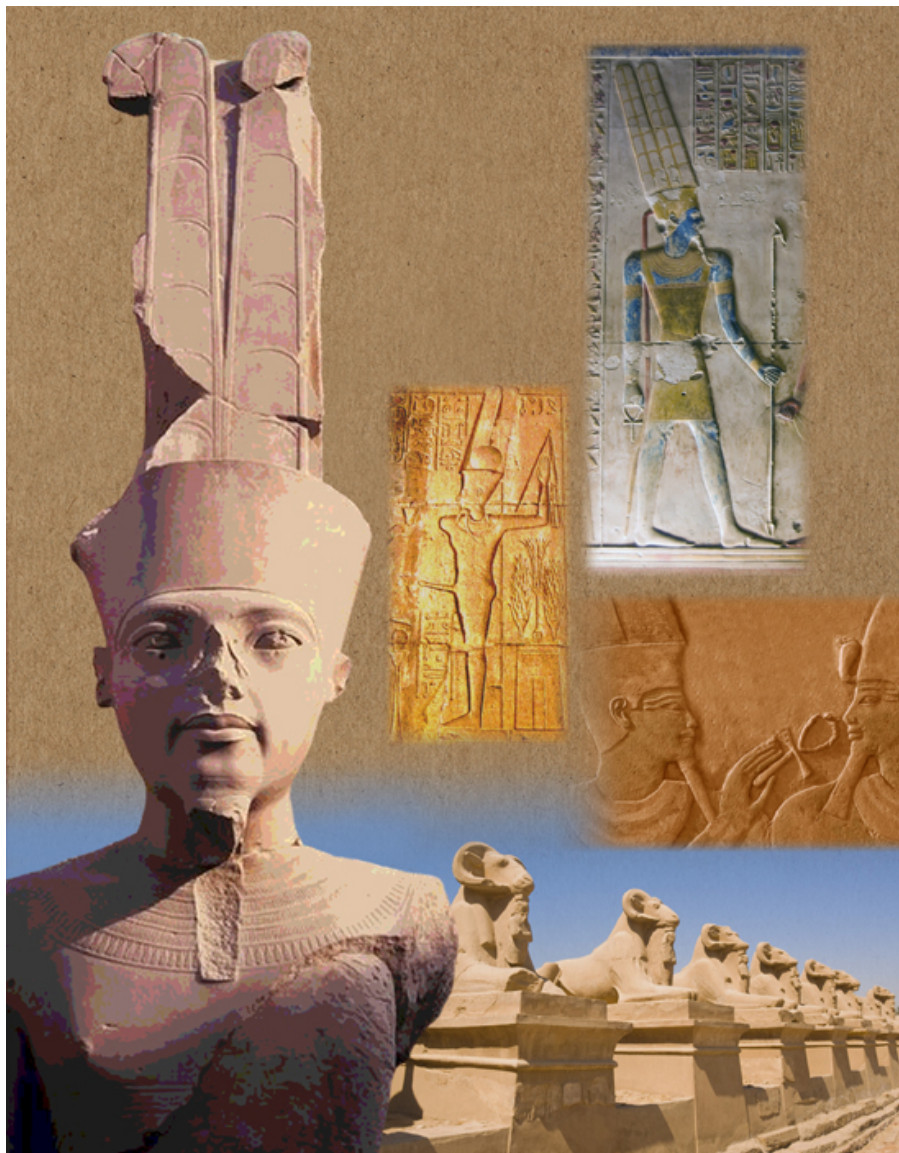
MENTUHOTEP II

reigned 2040 BCE

He reunited Egypt after the First Intermediate Period, becoming the first king of the Middle Kingdom

30-SECOND TEXT

M. Eaton-Krauss



Amun could be represented as a king or as a fertility god. Ram-headed sphinxes lined the avenue leading to Amun's temple in Karnak.

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

the 30-second history

The Egyptians made careful burial preparations to ensure a ready supply of provisions for the afterlife. Many products were created specifically for the tomb. Papyri, amulets, and other objects contained excerpts from the Book of the Dead or other mortuary texts to help the tomb owner's spirit overcome the obstacles it would encounter on its journey through the underworld. Coffins (usually of wood or cartonnage) and/or stone sarcophagi decorated with religious motifs and spells safeguarded the body. Four stone canopic jars fashioned with the heads of deities protected the separately embalmed viscera. Carved heart scarabs were placed on the torsos of mummies to aid in the Weighing of the Heart ceremony before Osiris, judge of the dead. Faience or wooden shabtis and models of servants were created to serve the tomb owner by performing all requisite tasks in the next world. Items utilized during life could also later be interred in burials, including furniture, clothing and jewelry, weapons, and/or tools of the deceased's trade. Board games, such as senet, were popular pastimes among the living and took on additional religious significance when placed in tombs. Quantities of different kinds of food and drink offerings were provided in ceramic or stone vessels for the deceased's continued nourishment.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Much like the Boy Scouts, the philosophy of the ancient Egyptians, who hoped to enjoy a blessed life after death, was "be prepared."

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Ideally, family members and funerary priests would continue to make new offerings in the tomb chapel, thereby provisioning the deceased's spirit in perpetuity. However, because this eternal devotion could not be guaranteed, the practical-minded Egyptians devised other methods to ensure their afterlives. Images of offering bearers, friezes of objects, offering lists, and formulae frequently inscribed on tomb walls and coffins, as well as stone, metal, or wooden models, were intended to magically replace/replenish actual offerings.

RELATED HISTORIES

PRIVATE TOMBS

MEKETRE MODELS

MORTUARY TEXTS

TOMB ROBBERY

30-SECOND TEXT

Rachel Aronin



Canopic jars and shabti figures were essential pieces of equipment. The Weighing of the Heart ceremony (top) was a key test on the journey to the netherworld.

MORTUARY TEXTS

the 30-second history

Mortuary texts were designed as guidebooks or instruction manuals for life after death. In the Old Kingdom, the Pyramid Texts, a series of more than 700 spells comprising some of the oldest known religious writings in the world, were inscribed on the walls of royal pyramids. They focused on safeguarding and restoring the deceased pharaoh's remains and allowing him to ascend to the heavens to join with the sun god and the "Imperishable Stars." By the Middle Kingdom, these funerary spells (along with many new ones) had been made available to a wider audience, inscribed on private burial goods, especially coffins. These Coffin Texts emphasized the deceased's journey through a subterranean realm presided over by Osiris, the judge of the dead. Many obstacles threatened the deceased and the spells provided sacred knowledge and magical protection. The Book of Two Ways, a subset of these texts, for the first time included illustrations, showing different paths through the underworld. Painted vignettes became numerous and quite lavish in the New Kingdom Book of Going Forth by Day (known as the Book of the Dead). The judgment scene before Osiris, during which the deceased denied committing any sins in life and his heart was weighed against the feather of Truth (maat), was a significant and frequently depicted episode.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Numerous ancient Egyptian magico-religious texts were utilized to guide and preserve the soul after death, ensuring a prosperous and beautiful afterlife in the next world.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

As mortuary texts, originally composed exclusively for pharaohs, were adapted and utilized by an ever-widening portion of the populace on private tombs, coffins, papyri, and amulets, new compositions were created solely for royal burials. The "Amduat" and later Royal Netherworld Books depict the deceased king's nightly journey with the sun god, who travels through the netherworld and, by means of a mystical union with Osiris at midnight, is revived and reborn with each new dawn.

RELATED HISTORIES

PRIVATE TOMBS

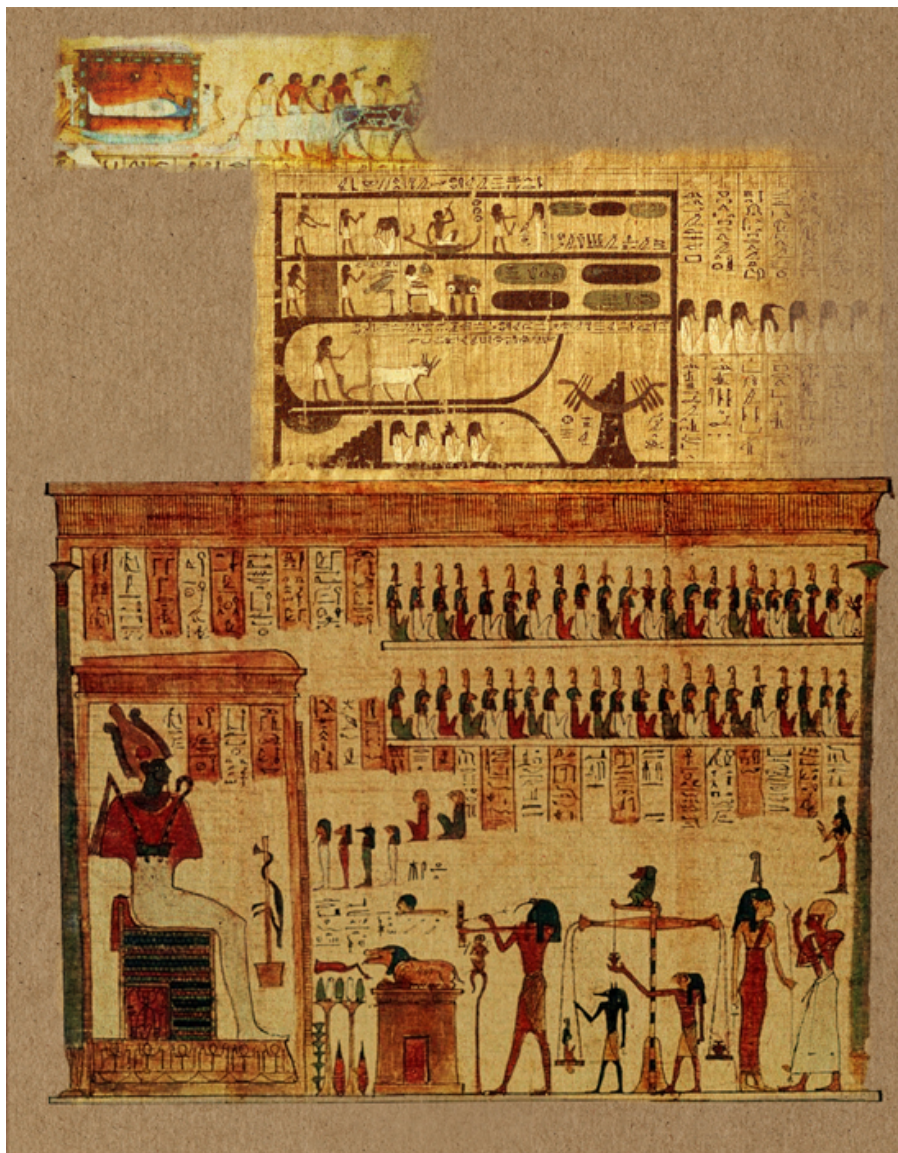
RE, THE SUN GOD

OSIRIS & RESURRECTION

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

30-SECOND TEXT

Rachel Aronin



Appearing on tomb walls, coffins, papyri, and amulets, mortuary texts were guides to the afterlife. The judgment before Osiris (bottom) was a common scene.

WISDOM

the 30-second history

“Instructions,” as the Egyptians called Wisdom Texts, taught young men how to behave properly, in order to secure their place in the rigidly hierarchical society. As one text states, “A woman is asked about her husband while a man is asked about his rank.” Although some Instructions were purportedly written by famous noblemen from earlier periods, it is possible that they were written later and attributed to distinguished ancestors to add authority. The advice ranged from demonstrating proper table manners to choosing the right words for a certain situation, or even sleeping on a thought before uttering it. Initiates were warned to stay silent about information not observed first-hand, for indiscreet words could be used against the thoughtless one. Recommendations varied, depending on whether one was dealing with a superior, a social equal, or an underling. At home, a husband was to respect his wife and not question her judgment, while a guest in another’s house should avoid snooping or approaching the women improperly. Other advice included respecting the elderly and not laughing at the unfortunate, who were “in God’s hand.” Instructions were also given to crown princes, who were counseled to be “skillful in speech,” for “the tongue is a king’s sword” and “speaking is stronger than any fighting.”

3-SECOND SURVEY

Wisdom literature is a genre of texts composed to teach a code of ethics that would assure its listeners prominent social standing.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

All ancient Egyptian “Instructions” were designed for the improvement of upper-class young men by teaching them proper virtues and attitudes. As the sage Ptahhotep counseled his sons, “Don’t be overly confident of your knowledge; consult the ignorant as well as the learned. The limits of expertise can never be attained; there are no craftsmen who have attained their mastery.”

RELATED HISTORIES

WRITING

LITERATURE

GENDERS & CAREERS

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

PTAHHOTEP

ca. 25th century BCE

30-SECOND TEXT
Ronald J. Leprohon



The 12th Dynasty Prisse Papyrus records the Instructions of Kagemni (top right), a nobleman. Like other Wisdom Texts, he advocated moral behavior and virtue.

TOMB ROBBERY

the 30-second history

Did all ancient Egyptians follow the culture's moral code, and fear divine retribution for misbehavior? Clearly for some, the lure of fabulous royal grave goods proved too tempting. An important distinction here is between tomb reuse and abuse, and actual tomb robbing. Families died out or moved away, and cults ceased to operate; in these cases tombs were taken over by later individuals, or the materials quarried for other uses. In other cases, malicious damage was inflicted on the tomb's inscriptions in an effort to obliterate the memory and survival of the deceased's spirit. But tomb robbery was the outright theft of precious materials, and royal tombs, whether pyramids or rock-cut sepulchers, were the choice targets. Almost all royal tombs were plundered in antiquity, many probably within years of the burial and perhaps aided by corrupt necropolis guards. Middle Kingdom royal pyramids were built with ingenious blocking stones, false passages, and other devices meant to protect their contents, but all to no avail. Our best evidence for robbery, and the legal consequences that followed, come from a New Kingdom series of tomb robbery papyri from Thebes. After "examination" with a stick (i.e. torture), the thieves confessed to breaking in, ripping jewelry off mummies, and sometimes burning the tombs.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Tomb robbers attacked royal and private tombs at all ages. New Kingdom trial accounts provide glimpses into ancient Egyptian criminal justice and corruption.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Dating to the late 20th Dynasty, the tomb robbery papyri concern corruption cases against Theban officials under Ramesses IX and XI. Inspection tours of the 17th Dynasty royal tombs on the West Bank followed, and eventually many royal mummies were hidden in two secret caches for their own protection. A pious move by concerned priests, or a prelude to plundering the royal grave goods to fill depleted state coffers?

RELATED HISTORIES

PYRAMIDS

DEIR EL-BAHARI ROYAL MUMMIES

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

LAW

30- SECOND TEXT

Peter Der Manuelian



Despite the many precautions taken when building the structures, most tombs were plundered for the precious goods that they contained.



ART & CULTURE

ART & CULTURE

GLOSSARY

ankh A hieroglyph and symbol for “life.” It is represented by a sandal strap in the shape of a cross with a loop at the top.

Apis bull A bull deity that was an important sacred animal in Egypt. Its shrine resided in Memphis, where the deity protected the king and the residence; a massive cemetery for Apis bulls is located at Saqqara and called the “Serapeum.” The Apis bull was a symbol of the pharaoh and the qualities of kingship.

block statues A unique type of Egyptian sculpture that first appeared during the 12th Dynasty. The subject (almost always male) squats on the ground with his knees drawn up to his chest. In one type, arms, legs, and torso are enveloped in a cloak providing space for inscriptions.

Christian Period The earliest history of Christianity in Egypt is poorly known, although it is traditionally believed that Saint Mark founded it in 33 CE. By the fourth century CE, many groups seem to have arisen as true Christian churches and the city of Alexandria became one of the great Christian centers.

Coptic The last stage of Egyptian hieroglyphs that was written using an adapted Greek alphabet, with six letters leftover from the earlier Egyptian demotic script. It was associated with the rise of Christianity in Egypt and flourished from the first to 13th centuries CE.

demotic Developed from hieratic, the demotic script was the most cursive script in Egypt that represented the “popular” use of the Egyptian language. It occurs from the 26th Dynasty to the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods.

djed pillar A hieroglyph and symbol for “stability.” It is thought to represent the spine of Osiris, god of the underworld, with whom it was associated.

faience More correctly known as “Egyptian faience,” this blue-green glaze is a nonclay ceramic of silica made from sand or crushed quartz. It was commonly used to make jewelry, amulets, scarabs, figurines, and vessels.

funerary temple Also called mortuary temple. A temple dedicated to commemorating the cult of the deceased king and the reign of the pharaoh who commissioned its construction.

hieratic The cursive form of Egyptian hieroglyphs used for everyday writing on papyri and ostraca as early as the First Dynasty. Young scribes learned to write hieratic before hieroglyphs.

hieroglyphs The Greek name for the main writing script of the ancient Egyptians, which consisted of picture characters (pictograms, or sense signs) and phonograms (sound signs) and was largely reserved for monumental objects and buildings, such as tomb and temple walls.

Predynastic Period (4500–3100 BCE; Neolithic and Dynasty 0) Before Egypt became a unified state governed by one ruling king, it was divided into two parts: Lower Egypt (in the north) and Upper Egypt (in the south). In each area, independent village settlements and cemeteries arose along with the development of agriculture and the domestication of animals.

Rameside Period (1295–1070 BCE; Dynasties 19–20) When the Delta-born vizier and military leader Paramessu arose on the throne as Ramesses I, he began a new line of kings, many of whom continued to be named Ramesses. The Rameside kings are known for their extensive building

programs and military prowess.

relief A sculptural technique used for the decoration of wall scenes and inscriptions on monumental stone buildings (temples and tombs). In ancient Egypt, it came into widespread use during the Fourth Dynasty and consists of images and inscriptions that often covered entire walls of rooms in buildings. Relief can be raised (bas-relief) or sunk (incised).

rock-cut temple Temples that were cut entirely into rock cliffs, such as the temples of Ramesses II at Abu Simbel, or had rock-cut inner chambers.

scarab An amulet in the form of a scarab beetle, associated with certain aspects of the sun god. Scarabs were generally inscribed on the bottom and were often incorporated into jewelry or used as administrative seals.

sistrum An ancient type of rattle used as a ceremonial instrument. It consisted of a metal hoop frame that held rings and bells, which made noise when the handle was shaken. The sistrum was associated with the goddess Hathor and was used by the priestesses of her cult to evoke protection, divine blessing, fertility, and rebirth.

sphinx A mythical creature with the body of a lion and the head of a man (or in some cases a ram), which often wore the royal nemes headdress. In Egypt, the most famous sphinx is the Great Sphinx at Giza.

MUSIC

the 30-second history

Scenes of music making are found as early as the Prehistoric Period, accompanying all facets of life. The god Bes, associated with childbirth, is often seen playing a harp or shaking a tambourine. In a folk story, the arrival of royal children is concluded by “the sound of singing, music, dancing, and exultation.” Banquet scenes show orchestras accompanying a singer holding his hand to his ear to be sure of correct pitch. A love poem invites a maiden’s sweetheart to “Come to me with beer and singers equipped with their instruments”; such odes were meant to be sung along with a harp, lyre, or flute. Liturgical scenes often show musicians, dancers, and singers; the last would have been trained in local schools, one of which—the Memphis School of Music—was famous in the Ramesside Period. Even field hands were entertained by musicians while working in the countryside. At the end of life, elaborate funerals included vigorous dancing, while funerary banquets included flautists, harpists, and people clapping. Percussion instruments comprised drums, tambourines, rattles, sistra, and hand clappers. Wind instruments consisted of flutes, clarinets, oboes, and trumpets. Stringed instruments were the harp, lyre, and the lute. Musicians must have learned and played by ear, because no written music has survived from antiquity.

3-SECOND SURVEY

From birth to death, music, singing, and dancing were an integral part of ancient Egyptian life.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Trumpets are mostly shown in scenes of warfare. The two found in Tutankhamun’s tomb were simple metal tubes made of silver and copper, respectively. Their range was so limited that they were probably only used rhythmically, playing single notes. In another military context, the ancient Roman author Virgil (Aeneid, 8) describes Queen Cleopatra shaking a sistrum while rallying her troops at the Battle of Actium.

RELATED HISTORIES

TEMPLES

PRIVATE TOMBS

TUTANKHAMUN’S TOMB

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



The ancient Egyptians played a variety of instruments, including lyres and flutes. Musicians played a part in funerary banquets.

WRITING

the 30-second history

Hieroglyphs, “sacred engravings,” are the ancient Egyptian writing system used from around 3250 BCE to 394 CE. The earliest examples come from a royal tomb at Abydos. Written on small ivory or bone labels attached to linen bags found in the tomb, the signs were used to indicate the quantity, provenance, or ownership of the goods. Because hieroglyphs were devised to write names and titles, their original purpose may have been administrative. A cursive form of hieroglyphs known as hieratic, which was quicker to draw on papyrus, developed at the same time. By the seventh century BCE, hieratic had evolved into demotic, an even simpler script. Hieroglyphs used the rebus system, which writes out the sounds of the language using pictures. Words written phonetically were complemented by sense signs, which helped readers determine the concept of the word; for example, a homonym such as henu, could be accompanied by the people sign to write the word “neighbors” or a jar for the word “measure.” During the Christian Period, Greek letters were used for Coptic, the last stage of the Egyptian language. In 1822, the linguist Jean-François Champollion deciphered hieroglyphs by using Greek and Hebrew sources to recognize Egyptian proper names on the Rosetta Stone.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Egyptian hieroglyphs used phonograms to write out the sounds of the language. Other scripts employed were cursive versions known as hieratic or demotic.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Egyptian hieroglyphs could be written vertically or horizontally from right to left or left to right. The clue to the direction of reading is given by the signs themselves: hieroglyphs that face right indicate a text to be read from right to left and vice versa. In a scene on a temple or tomb wall showing figures facing one another, the accompanying captions change direction to suit the orientation of the figures.

RELATED HISTORIES

MATHEMATICS & ASTRONOMY

MORTUARY TEXTS

BUREAUCRACY

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

JEAN-FRANÇOIS CHAMPOLLION

1790–1832

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



The Rosetta Stone contains the same text, in Greek and in two forms of Egyptian. In 1822 the inscription provided the breakthrough to deciphering hieroglyphs.

LITERATURE

the 30-second history

Nothing survives of the literary output from earlier periods, but the Middle Kingdom produced historical fiction, instructional material, and tales of magic, adventures abroad, a marooned sailor, and a peasant wronged by rapacious officials. The best of these works is The Story of Sinuhe. Set in the early 12th Dynasty, it tells of a royal bodyguard who deserts his post, flees to the Levant, and eventually returns to Egypt after being pardoned by the king. It was so popular that copies were transcribed, mostly on papyrus, for a full seven centuries. The New Kingdom brought tales of the gods and stories with well-known literary motifs. In The Taking of Joppa, a general ends a siege by hiding soldiers inside baskets disguised as gifts for the city. The hero of The Doomed Prince is confined in a tower to avoid the fate predicted for him by seven goddesses; he then journeys to the Levant, where he fabricates a story about an evil stepmother who wishes him harm, magically wins the hand of a princess in a tower, and is saved by her love. The Two Brothers tells of an older woman who attempts to seduce a younger man; when he refuses, she pretends to have been attacked, like Potiphar's wife in the Old Testament.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Literature, in the form of tales, poetry, and instructions, was used to entertain, educate, propagandize, and tell stories about the divine and everyday worlds.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Ancient Egyptian stories were meant to be heard instead of read. Puns and alliteration, themes grouped in couplets, and phrases couched in specific rhythms betray their oral origin. In a series of tales preserved in the Westcar Papyrus, an evening of storytelling at a royal court has each recitation begin with the phrase: "Then Prince [name] rose in order to speak, and he said ..."

RELATED HISTORIES

PHARAOH

MAGIC

WISDOM

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

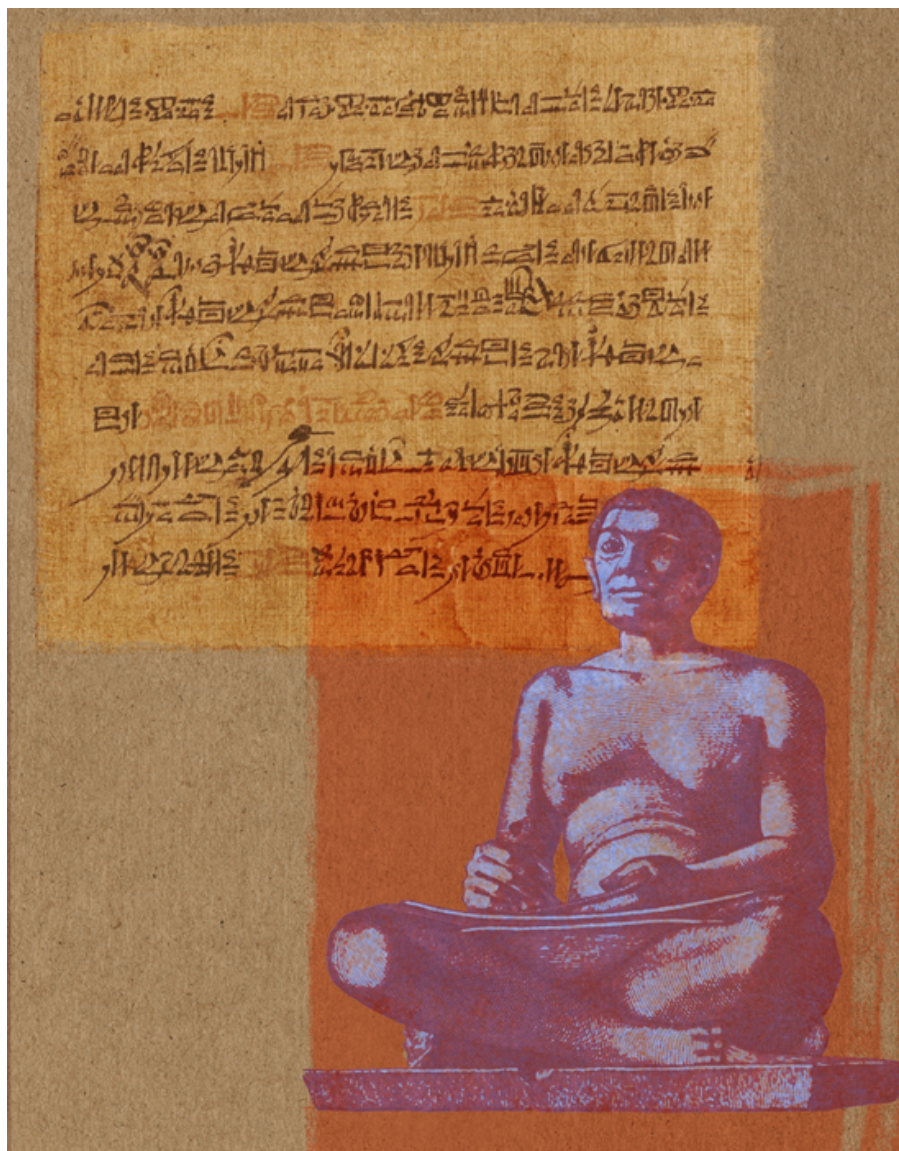
PENTAWER

ca. 13th century BCE

A king's scribe famous for writing down the "Poem of Kadesh"

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



Literature ranged from educational texts to narrative tales. Popular stories, such as *The Two Brothers*—a tale of seduction—were recorded on papyrus by scribes.

SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND

the 30-second history

Sculptors used hammers to work granite and quartzite, and chisels for carving limestone, alabaster, and wood. Copper-clad wooden statues and figures cast in gold and bronze were also produced. A grid enabled sculptors to adhere to standardized proportions. Wooden statuary was made in pieces pegged together. A stone statue started as a squared-up block with front, profile, and back views of the figure drawn on the sides. Back pillars and back slabs are structural features typical of stone statuary, like “negative space,” stone left standing between limbs and torso. The subject’s name and titles were inscribed on the base and statues were painted unless they were made of skin-colored materials. Men, whether king, god, or commoner, were depicted striding forward, left leg advanced, grasping accessories that signaled their status. Women were customarily shown standing with their feet together, hands open at the sides. Scale in group statuary usually reflected nature; wives were shorter than their spouses and children smaller yet. Only men owned scribe statues—which documented membership in the literate elite—and block statues. Introduced in the Middle Kingdom, block statues remained popular for centuries. Sphinxes flanked processional avenues and guarded entrances to sacred precincts.

3-SECOND SURVEY

A statue enabled its subject, whether a god, a king, or a commoner, to exist in a tomb or temple and to benefit from the cult practiced there in perpetuity.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Figures fashioned in clay and carved from animal tusks were created well before the unification, but the earliest evidence for stone sculpture dates to late Predynastic times. Limestone fragments from Hierakonpolis include an ear and a nose, while larger than life-size statues of the fertility god Min discovered at Coptos demonstrate that gods were already made in the image of man by the time of Narmer at the latest.

RELATED HISTORIES

NARMER

BUST OF NEFERTITI

TOOLS & CRAFTS

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHIES

HANS GERHART EVERS

1900–1993

His 1929 study of Middle Kingdom royal sculpture is a methodological milestone

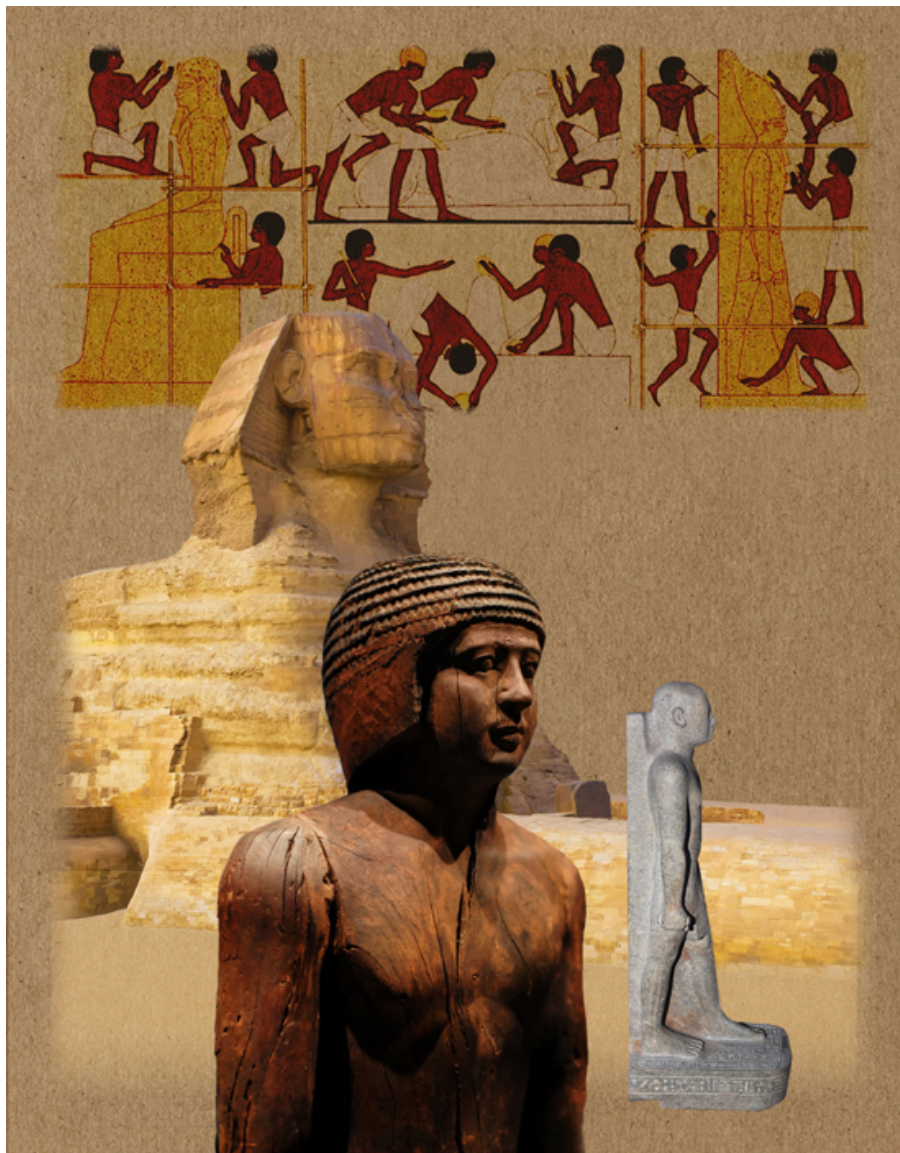
JACQUES VANDIER

1904–1973

Volume 3 of his *Manuel d'archéologie égyptienne* (1957) provides an excellent introduction to ancient Egyptian statuary

30-SECOND TEXT

M. Eaton-Krauss



Statues were made from wood or stone. The Giza sphinx is the largest freestanding sculpture in the ancient world.

RAMESSES II

In 1976, 3,200 years after his death, the mummy of Ramesses II was welcomed with full military honors when it arrived in Paris to undergo treatment to prevent further deterioration. The style of his reception shows how the king's reputation, which he had carefully bolstered over a 66-year reign (1279–1213 BCE), had survived into Classical antiquity and on into 19th-century Romanticism, when Percy Shelley wrote his famous sonnet "Ozymandias."

Ramesses II's building activity surpasses that of all other Egyptian kings and extended from the Levant to the Sudan. Most significant were the residence city of Pi-Ramesses in the eastern Nile Delta, a string of forts on Egypt's western border to counter the military threat posed by the Libyans, subterranean catacombs for the burial of the sacred Apis bulls in Saqqara, a temple for Osiris at Abydos, additions to the temples of Karnak and Luxor, the king's tomb and a gigantic mausoleum for his dozens of sons in the Valley of the Kings, a large funerary temple (the Ramesseum), and the two rock temples of Abu Simbel in Nubia. Ramesses also usurped hundreds of earlier monuments and statues. A marked departure from tradition was the extent to which the king had himself worshipped as a god during his lifetime. The king's aspirations to regain control over Middle Syria failed when he was defeated by the Hittite king in the famous Battle of Kadesh in 1275 BCE. The texts and depictions of the battle present the king and his god Amun as victorious over their Hittite enemies, a unique religious and literary document disseminated in multiple copies, both on temple walls and papyri. In 1254 BCE, the two empires concluded the first preserved peace treaty in human history, a replica of which is today on display at the United Nations headquarters in New York. Parts of the correspondence exchanged between the two courts dealt with Ramesses' marriage of two Hittite princesses, a state visit from the Hittite crown prince, and medical aid. From Hittite records we know that Egypt also provided the Hittites with supplies of grain and helped them to build a naval fleet.

The most famous of Ramesses' principal wives was queen Nefertari, who owned a magnificent tomb in the Valley of the Queens. Of the king's sons, the most important were his fourth son, Khaemwese, a scholar who directed much of his activities toward the study and restoration of the monuments of Egypt's past, and his 13th son, Merenptah, who assumed the throne after the king's death.



PAINTING & RELIEF

the 30-second history

Conventions of two-dimensional art developed concurrently with the hieroglyphic script; there was but one word for both scribe and painter. Characteristic views of a subject were combined to create a “complete” impression of it, most notably in rendering human figures with one frontal eye in a head drawn in profile. The shoulders are also frontal, but the trunk is in profile. The first and last steps in creating relief lay in the hands of draftsmen-painters, who drew figures according to a standardized canon of proportions and composed scenes in registers. When sculptors finished carving, painters brought the reliefs to life by adding color; finally, they outlined the figures to give them prominence. Strong, flat color was the rule, applied as dictated by convention: women’s skin was yellow, men’s red-brown, and the hair of both sexes was black. Status determined scale—gods and kings towered above priests and servants. Interiors were carved in raised relief to catch the light; sunk relief was used for exterior surfaces exposed to the sun. Draftsmen had to use a grid to draw figures of the owner and his family on tomb walls and those of the king and gods in temples, but they could and did give full rein to their creative impulses when designing and coloring subsidiary figures, flora, and fauna.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Painted relief was preferred for decorating temples and tombs, because its long-term chances of survival were higher.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

In the late 19th and early 20th century, archaeologists excavating settlement sites discovered evidence for paintings not only on walls inside palaces and the homes of commoners—flora and fauna of the marshes and domestic scenes—but also on the exterior (swags and abstract designs). The tradition of decorating the whitewashed exterior of mud-brick dwellings is still practiced in villages along the Nile today.

RELATED HISTORIES

THE BUST OF NEFERTITI

WRITING

SCULPTURE IN THE ROUND

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

HENRY GEORGE FISCHER

1923–2006

30-SECOND TEXT

M. Eaton-Krauss



Artists had to follow a set of conventions and work to a grid, but they were allowed creative freedom in the depiction of minor figures and of details, such as flora and fauna.

MINOR ARTS

the 30-second history

Ancient Egyptians valued appearances. The well-to-do spared no expense in adorning themselves and their homes with beautifully decorated, status-signifying apparel and accoutrements. Fine linen kilts, tunics, and dresses could be intricately draped and pleated, or decorated with embroidered or applied designs. The customarily white clothing provided a perfect backdrop for multicolored jewelry, including beaded broad collars, rings, bracelets/anklets, and necklaces inlaid with semiprecious gems. While these items were too costly for average Egyptians, protective amulets, made of faience, shell, bone/ivory, copper/bronze, and various stones, were popular among all social classes. Amulets depicted deities, sacred animals, parts of the body, or hieroglyphs (such the ankh or the djed pillar). The most ubiquitous shape for amulets was the scarab beetle, associated with the regenerative power of the sun god, and therefore popular in both everyday and funerary contexts. Clothing and jewelry were stored in brightly painted boxes inlaid with ivory and ebony or ornamented with hieroglyphs. Furniture sometimes had carved and/or gilded elements representing animals or plants. Ceramic vessels could be painted or otherwise embellished, particularly during the Predynastic Period and the New Kingdom.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Besides exquisite paintings, reliefs, and statuary, the ancient Egyptians often fashioned items for personal adornment and practical use that were themselves minor works of art.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

The term “minor arts” (aka “decorative” or “applied” arts) traditionally refers to the design and production of utilitarian objects, as opposed to “fine arts” (such as painting and sculpture), which are considered to have no objective purpose other than aesthetics. However, this distinction between minor and fine arts is largely a modern Western construction, and can be somewhat misleading when applied to ancient Egypt, where all “art” was created to be, in some manner, functional.

RELATED HISTORIES

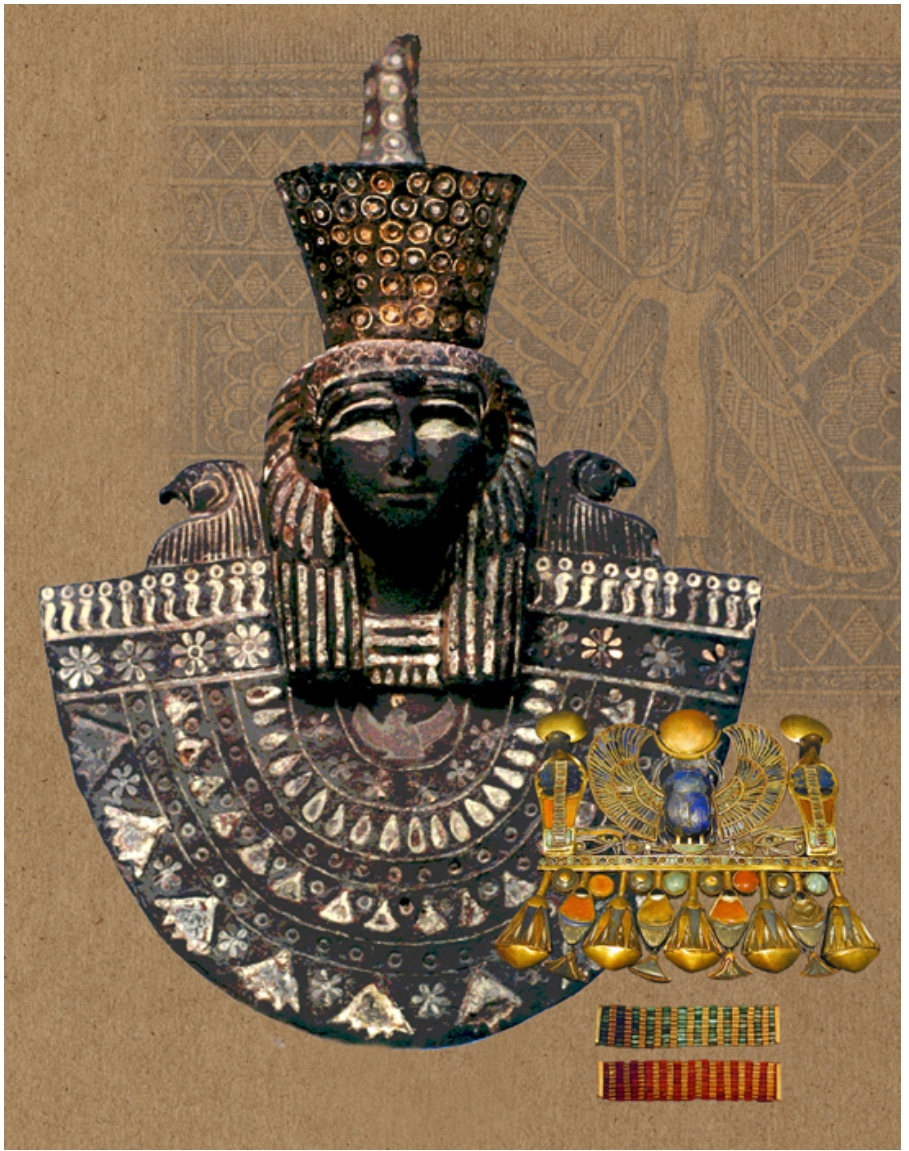
HETEPHERES' TOMB

TUTANKHAMUN'S TOMB

TOOLS & CRAFTS

30-SECOND TEXT

Rachel Aronin



Elaborate, multicolored jewelry was designed to stand out against the white clothing worn by the rich.



LIFE & SOCIETY

Amarna Period The era of Egyptian history centering on the pharaoh Akhenaten (1352–1336 BCE), who established a new royal city at Akhetaten (“Horizon of the Aten”) at what is now the site of Amarna in Middle Egypt.

chariotry The introduction of chariotry as a military unit and weapon in ancient Egypt, whereby chariots (light, open, two-wheel carriages pulled by horses) were used to carry riders into battle occurred during the Hyksos Period at the end of the Middle Kingdom. Chariots were effective for high speed, strength, and mobility in warfare and hunting.

evil eye In many cultures, the evil eye is a look believed to cause misfortune or injury to whom it is directed. In ancient Egypt, the chaotic snake god Apophis was thought to cause harm by his evil glance. Talismans and amulets were created to protect against the evil eye and its effects.

Hittite The Hittites were an ancient people stemming from Anatolia (present-day Turkey) who established a capital at Hattusa. During the reign of the Hittite king Shuppiluliuma I (1400 BCE), territorial expansion created conflict with New Kingdom Egyptians. The most famous conflict occurred at the Battle of Kadesh (a site in Syria, on the Orontes River) fought during the reign of Ramesses II.

instructional literature Also called Wisdom Texts or didactic literature. A genre of texts (called *sebayt* in Egyptian) that often incorporates the teachings of a father for his son. Such texts advise on all aspects of personal and professional behavior.

Levant The geographic and cultural region of the Eastern Mediterranean stretching between Anatolia and Egypt that today comprises Cyprus, Lebanon, Syria, the Palestinian territories, Jordan, Israel, and southern Turkey.

maat The ancient Egyptian concept for truth, justice, and cosmic order that was also personified as a goddess represented as a female wearing a tall feather on her head, or by the feather alone. It was the king’s duty to uphold *maat* for the entire country, so much so that the value and legitimization of the king’s reign depended upon how well he maintained *maat*.

Macedonia An ancient Greek kingdom that dominated the Hellenistic world under Philip II (359–336 BCE).

nomarch The title given to the ruler or governor of a nome. Nomarchs had regional control over their district, but were responsible for answering to the vizier and central administration of Egypt.

nome A Greek term used to denote a province or administrative division in ancient Egypt. Since early times, the country was divided into separate nomes or districts, each ruled by a nomarch who could collect taxes and administer justice. There were 42 traditional provinces of Egypt: 22 in Upper Egypt and 20 in Lower Egypt.

Nubia A region extending from southern Egypt to northern Sudan. Egypt sought to exploit quantities of gold from this region, as well as to import incense, ebony, ivory, exotic animals, and dwarfs through trade.

offering list A list of items (food, drink, etc.) commonly found on funerary stelae, false doors, tomb walls, and coffins, which allowed the deceased to partake in receiving symbolic sustenance for the

afterlife.

oracle The Egyptian consultation of oracles involved requesting a deity to answer a question posed to its public image. In the Ramesside Period, oracles began to be accessed by ordinary individuals who wanted to consult the gods on all kinds of everyday affairs.

Ptolemaic Dynasty (305 BCE–30 BCE; Ptolemy I to Ptolemy XV) The period of history when the Ptolemies ruled in Egypt. Ptolemy I was a general under Alexander the Great, who was allocated control over Egypt as a satrap (governor) after Alexander's death.

qenbet The ancient Egyptian term for a type of administrative council that was concerned with judicial activities.

scribe Considered one of the noblest professions in Egypt, the office of the scribe consisted of composing, writing, and copying documents of all types.

Sea People A number of different cultural groups that were involved in a great migration across the Mediterranean Sea. According to Egyptian sources, they invaded and fought with Egypt twice: Year 5 of Merneptah's reign and year 8 of Ramesses III's reign during the 19th and 20th Dynasties.

vizier The highest executive official of the land in service under the pharaoh. The vizier (ancient name *tjaty*) served the king and acted on his behalf to supervise the running of the country.

CHILDHOOD & FAMILY

the 30-second history

A woman in labor was attended by her female family members or a midwife. Children may have been breast-fed for up to three years, either by the mother or a wet nurse. In artistic representations, children were rendered naked and with shaved heads, save for a side lock of hair that was sometimes braided. They could be shown with pet dogs or cats, or holding a favorite bird or even a duck. Young boys from the lower classes learned their trade by accompanying their fathers to the fields or workshops, while young girls apprenticed in the home at their mothers' side. Wealthier children were educated in local schools, the most common subjects being rhetoric, mathematics, geography, and even foreign languages. The age at which the transition to adulthood occurred is not known, although ceremonies, such as "tying the headband" or circumcising young boys, may have marked the occasion. When they were deemed old enough, young men and women were expected to marry. The union, considered more of a social than a legal contract, seems to have been arranged by the families and no marriage ceremonies are known from ancient Egypt. The main purpose for marrying was to produce children, although both images and texts show evidence of genuine affection between married couples.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Celebrated in numerous artistic representations and texts from all periods, the nuclear family was the most important social unit in ancient Egypt.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

"He who makes love to a married woman is killed on her doorstep." This warning from ancient Egyptian instructional literature is characteristic of such teachings, with popular stories also predicting lethal consequences for adultery. The reality was more benign. Legal records indicate that unfaithfulness was viewed as a personal matter between husband and wife, with the state acting more in a conciliatory rather than punitive capacity and the punishment was usually a financial one.

RELATED HISTORIES

WISDOM

LITERATURE

LAW

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

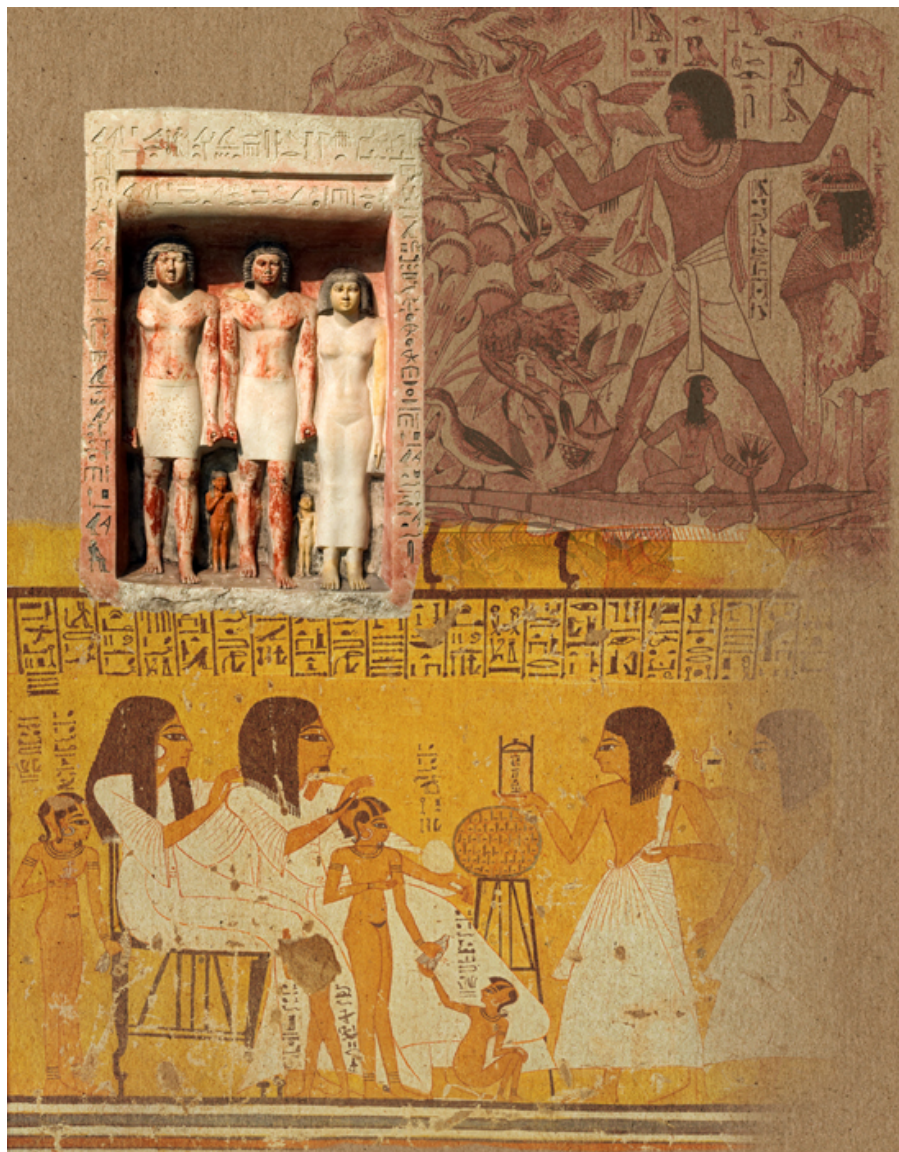
PTAHHOTEP

ca. 2400 BCE

Ancient Egyptian sage

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



In family portraits, children were represented on a much smaller scale than adults; they were usually naked, with a side lock of hair to show their youth.

GENDER & CAREERS

the 30-second history

Gender played a major role in the essentially rural economy of ancient Egypt. Men worked in the fields, tended herds and flocks, fished, trapped, and hunted. Women winnowed grain at the harvest; otherwise their place was in the home with domestic responsibilities, including rearing the children. On larger estates women worked alongside men making bread and beer, but weaving was the only craft practiced by women. Professionals traditionally claimed to be “self-made” men; in fact, most followed in their fathers’ footsteps. Men ran the government and the temples. Women could serve as priestesses in the service of goddesses. Both sexes trained as musicians and dancers in the cult, as well as in the households of the elite; women were also professional mourners. Kingship was reserved for men; the few women who ruled before Ptolemaic times ascended the throne despite their gender, when there was no surviving royal male or when he was too young to rule. The most influential role attainable for a nonroyal woman was wet nurse of the king’s children. There was but one, svelte ideal of ageless female beauty. Men, by contrast, were broad-shouldered athletic types when young; with advancing age, increasing girth indicated prosperity, while, at least in art, a receding hairline apparently affected only manual laborers.

3-SECOND SURVEY

A person’s role was largely biologically determined; even if a woman’s choice of career was limited, she nevertheless enjoyed considerable personal freedom in everyday life.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

The “Satire of the Trades,” composed early in the Middle Kingdom, was one of the most popular texts read and copied in ancient Egypt. It glorified the scribal profession above all others: only the scribe was his own boss. Scribal training was the first step on the ladder of success. Egyptian women did not learn to read and write, but they were legally privileged, by contrast to their sisters in contemporaneous cultures.

RELATED HISTORIES

TOOLS & CRAFTS

MUSIC

CHILDHOOD & FAMILY

BUREAUCRACY

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

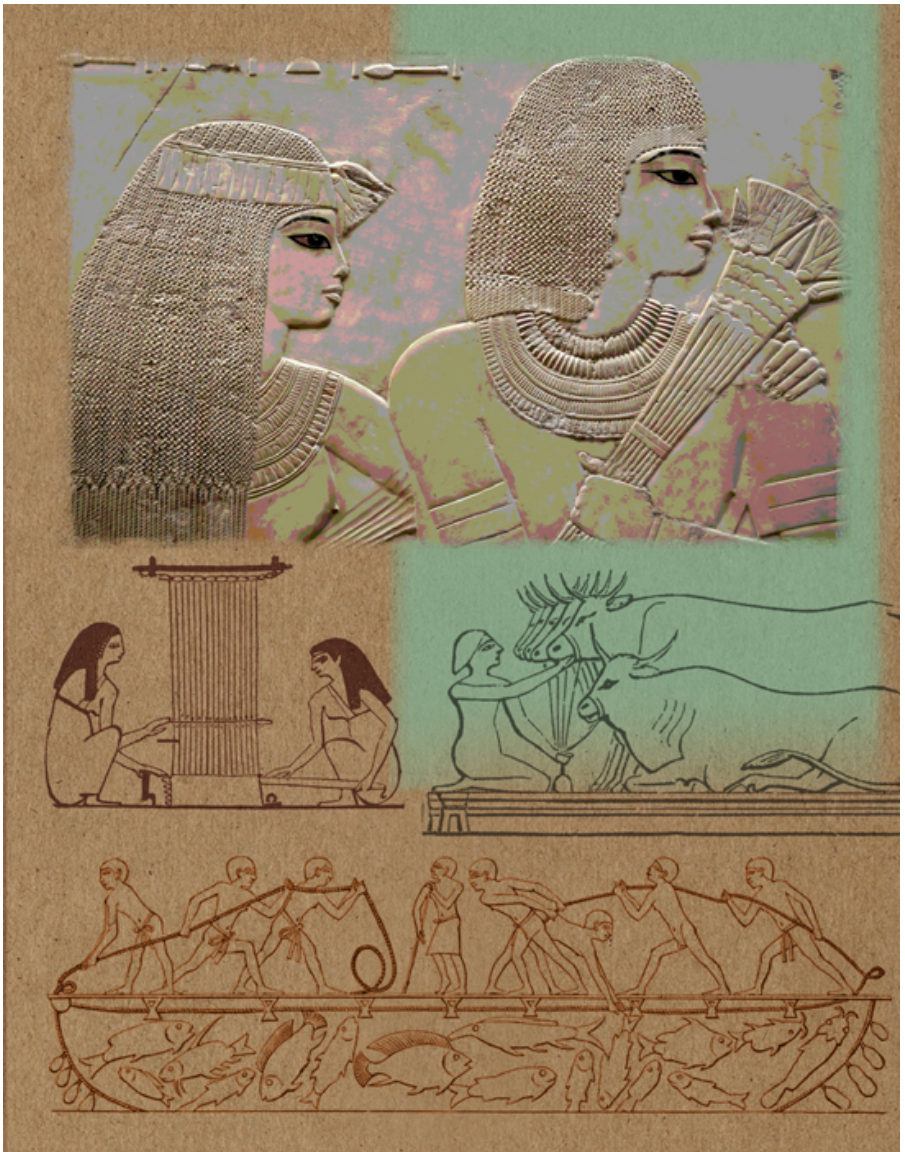
HATSHEPSUT

reigned ca. 1473–1458 BCE

One of the very few female “kings” of Egypt, known today thanks to her trading expedition and building projects at Thebes

30-SECOND TEXT

M. Eaton-Krauss



Artists followed conventions in the way they represented men and women. Careers were determined by gender, with men undertaking more active roles.

FOOD

the 30-second history

Egyptian subsistence centered on such grains as emmer wheat and barley. Payments, wages, and taxes were measured in grain or grain products, such as bread and beer. These two essential staples were produced in tandem in homes or bakery-brewery facilities. Egyptian beer had the consistency of porridge and was fairly nutritious. Alongside these carbohydrates, average Egyptians ate mostly vegetables and fruits. The popularity of garlic and onions probably made for pungent mealtime chat. Legumes, such as chickpeas and lentils provided extra protein, while lesser-known vegetables included parts of the lotus, papyrus, and sedge plants. Fresh or dried, dates and figs were favored fruits. Wine made from grapes, dates, and figs was a luxury drink. Drunkenness was acknowledged and, for certain religious festivals, desired. For sweet cakes needing more than fruit, the rich obtained honey. Income determined the amount of meat in one's diet, with prime cuts of cattle, sheep, and goat going mainly to the elite. Geese and ducks were primary choices for poultry and eggs, sometimes joined on the grill by pigeons and quail. Egyptians also hunted wild game, such as gazelle, oryx, and ibex, and caught numerous species of Nile fish by net, hook, or spear. Contrary to popular belief, the Egyptian menu sometimes included pork.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Although the ancient Egyptians didn't invent the "food pyramid," all the ingredients for a well-balanced diet were readily available.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Along with tomb scenes of agriculture, food-preparation, and hunting, offering lists provide information about the Egyptians' food options. Standard phrases preface the offerings as coming from the king and at least one deity, but ask that passersby read the list aloud to magically render them real for the deceased in the next world. Almost always, the first two requests are bread and beer, often in batches of a thousand each to signify an endless supply.

RELATED HISTORIES

THE NILE

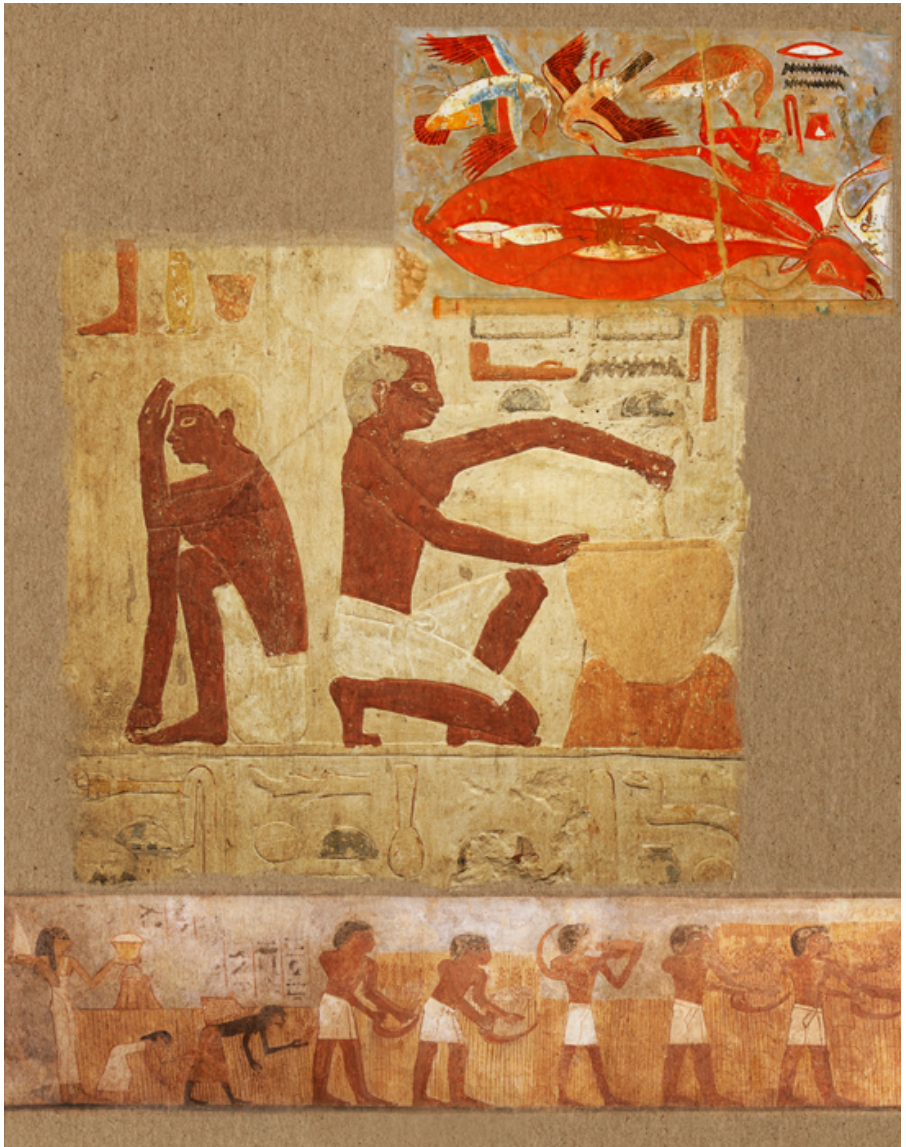
TEMPLES

PRIVATE TOMBS

MEKETRE MODELS

30-SECOND TEXT

Nicholas Picardo



Grains were the key ingredients in the Egyptian diet, forming the basis for staples, such as bread and beer. Other foods, such as meat, were more commonly eaten by the wealthy.

BUREAUCRACY

the 30-second history

If modern paperwork seems at times overwhelming, ancient Egyptian “papyrus-work” was at least as cumbersome—there were thousands of administrative job titles. About three weeks were required to send dispatches from north to south; six weeks altogether to receive an answer. Literary papyri extol the virtues of scribal literacy, while other professions are denounced as filthy, back-breaking, lower-class endeavors. The pharaoh relied on “mayors” (haty-a) of national and local capitals to collect taxes, organize conscripted labor, and implement royal decrees. In addition, there were the qenbet councils: two great qenbets, in Memphis and in Thebes, each headed by a vizier overseeing priests, bureaucrats, and military personnel. They handled civil cases, while the lesser qenbets dealt with criminal cases, claims over property rights, and other disputes. Administering burial complexes took effort, too; the Fifth Dynasty Abusir Papyri describe personnel, work shifts, and payments for royal mortuary temple functions. Major players in the administration, after the vizier, included the treasurer, the military general, the royal documents scribe, and the chief lector priest. But specialization was looser; the Sixth Dynasty official Weni commanded the army, resolved a harem conspiracy, and led an expedition to buy his pharaoh’s sarcophagus.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Hierarchical organization, starting with the pharaoh, and relying on the literate elites, controlled resource allocation, collected taxes, implemented royal commands, and settled disputes of all kinds.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

As Egyptian bureaucracy expanded, new positions were created. Old Kingdom rulers created the “overseer of Upper Egypt” position. The Middle Kingdom saw “nomarchs” (nome governors) rise in power. And in the New Kingdom, a “king’s son of Kush” or Nubian viceroy, supervised Egypt’s interests in the south. Ramesses III’s “Papyrus Harris” records huge donations to his own temple cult; it’s the longest Egyptian manuscript and is dedicated to bureaucracy and administration.

RELATED HISTORIES

RISE OF THE STATE

AMARNA LETTERS

TOMB ROBBERY

LAW

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

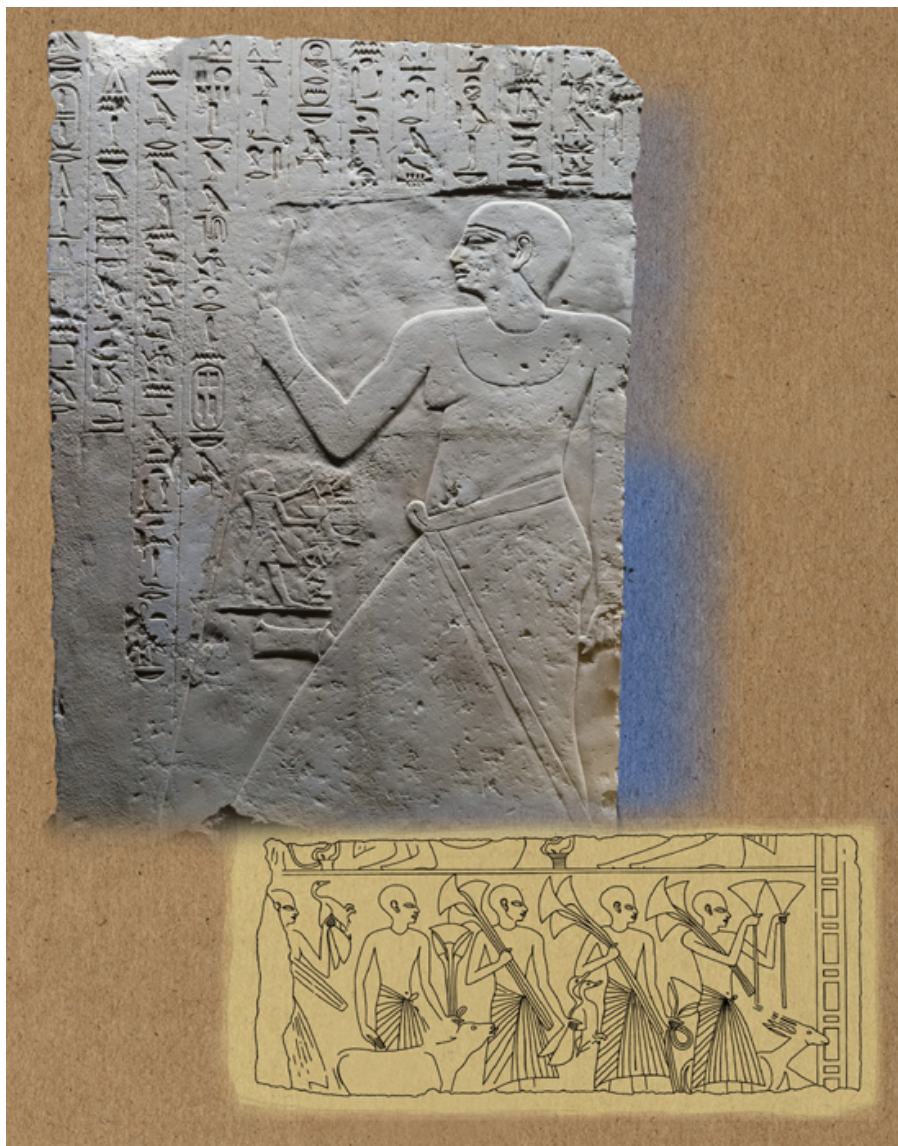
WENI

fl. from 2323 BCE

Court official of the Sixth Dynasty

30-SECOND TEXT

Peter Der Manuelian



The pharaoh required countless administrators to assist him in managing the large and complex Egyptian society.

SPORTS & GAMES

the 30-second history

Ancient Egyptians of all classes and ages enjoyed games of skill and chance, both athletic pursuits (hunting, racing, dancing, fencing, wrestling) and less physically active pastimes (board games, marbles, ball games). Egyptian art often depicts individuals, their families, and households engaged in these recreations. Archaeologists have found objects that were employed in such activities (including wooden game boards, leather or woven balls, fencing sticks, and swords) in both funerary and domestic contexts. Kings displayed their physical prowess and fitness to rule by performing a ritual run before their subjects and the gods during royal jubilee celebrations, a rite known since earliest pharaonic times. The elite hunted wild game in the deserts and fish and fowl in the marshes, recreational activities that also symbolized the triumph of civilized order over untamed natural chaos. The lower classes enjoyed racing (on foot and in boats), wrestling, bare-knuckle boxing, and fencing with wooden sticks or swords. Egyptians, both high born and low, played a number of different board games, the most popular of which was called senet, a race game that became so popular that it took on an increasingly mythologized dimension and, by the New Kingdom, came to represent the deceased's progression through the afterlife.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Recreational sports in ancient Egypt included many activities still practiced in some form today. They encouraged religious piety and national pride while providing widespread enjoyment.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Egyptian rulers are shown on temple walls in the New Kingdom and later performing a ritual where they strike balls with wooden bats or clubs. The balls, symbolically representing the “evil eye” of the gods’ enemy, are then caught or retrieved by temple priests and offered to the deities. Evidence exists that this sacred act may have had its roots in a children’s sport, which could, perhaps, have shared some affinities with modern ball games.

RELATED HISTORIES

TUTANKHAMUN'S TOMB

BURIAL EQUIPMENT

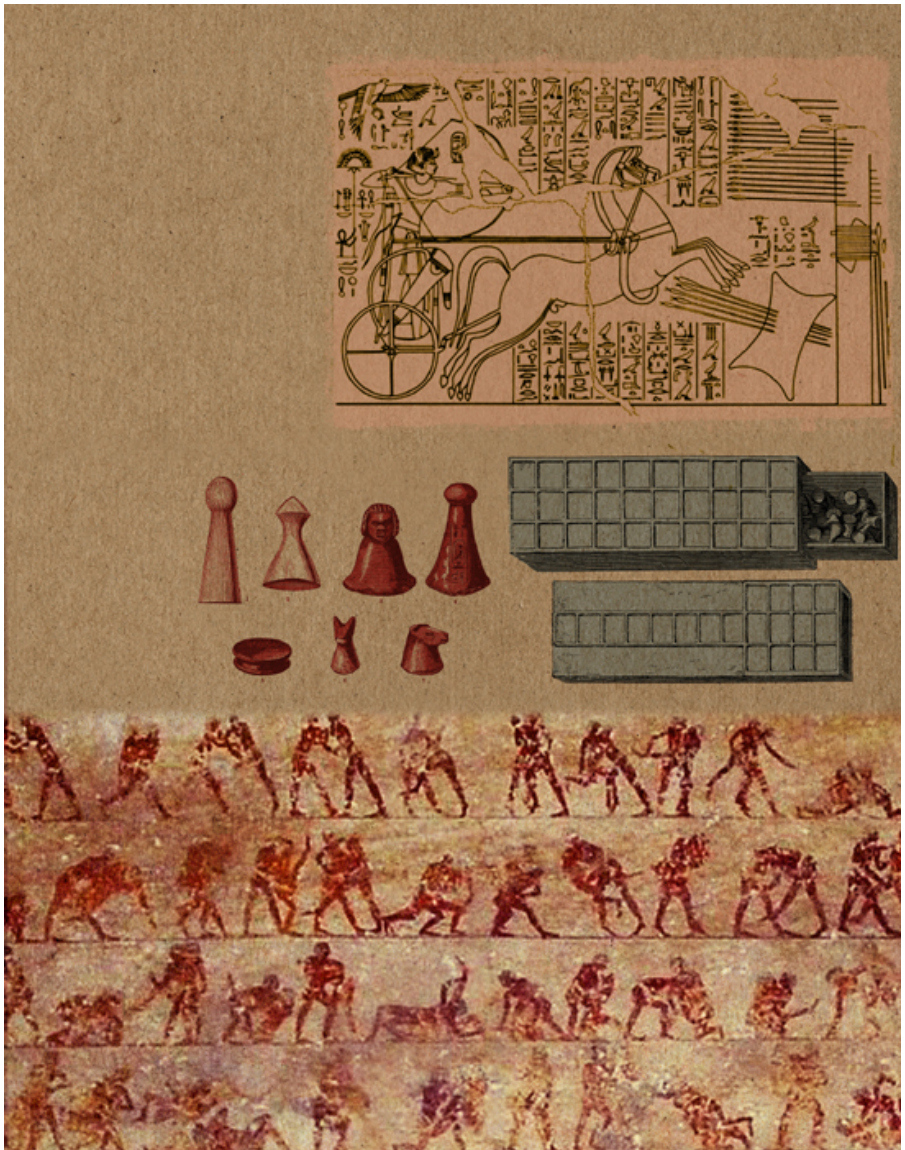
3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

AMENHOTEP II

reigned ca. 1427–1400 BCE

30-SECOND TEXT

Rachel Aronin



The ancient Egyptians enjoyed physical sports, such as hunting and wrestling, as well as more tranquil pastimes, like board games.

THE MILITARY

the 30-second history

Egypt's military changed significantly over the 2,500 years of its history. No standing army existed in the Old Kingdom when soldiers were conscripted for defense, military raids, and to procure raw materials. After 2000 BCE, Egypt established Nubia as a colony, secured by forts on the Second Cataract. The backbone of warfare at this time was the navy. The full-fledged military system of the New Kingdom comprised a standing army of infantry, navy, and chariotry, creating new careers and benefiting from advances in military technology. Kings Thutmose I and III established a large empire from southern Syria to the Fourth Cataract; their armies may have comprised 20,000 soldiers and 2,000 chariots. In 1275 BCE, Ramesses II was defeated by the Hittites, Egypt's rivals in Syria. Prior to the collapse of the Bronze Age around 1100 BCE, Egypt lost its possessions in the Levant and Nubia and had to counter incursions by Libyans and the Sea People to the Nile Delta. Periods of foreign occupation marked the first millennium, when a mercenary army was created, which was later glorified in epics. Rare military triumphs occurred in the sixth century BCE (warding the Babylonians off Egypt's border, followed by the conquest of Syria, Cyprus, and the Sudan) and against the Persians in the fourth century BCE.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Egypt's military evolved from a militia system through a professional armed force based on a strong navy to a large imperial force and, after the New Kingdom, a mercenary army.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Significant material evidence on warfare has been preserved, including 11 chariots, 6 of which were found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. Fieldwork in the capital city of Pi-Ramesses/Qantir in the eastern Nile Delta has uncovered weaponry workshops (including Hittite shield molds), and stone and metal implements from chariots. The excavations also uncovered an oval arena for the training of charioteers, where chariots were driven around octagonal pillars placed in the two focal points of the oval.

RELATED HISTORIES

EGYPT'S NEIGHBORS

FORTRESSES

RAMESSES II

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

PIANKHY

ca. 747–716 BCE

King of the Kushite (Nubian) empire, he conquered Egypt in 733 BCE, documented in the longest Egyptian narrative account of warfare

30-SECOND TEXT

Thomas Schneider



The introduction of the chariot transformed the nature of warfare; at center right is a reconstruction of one of the chariots discovered in Tutankhamun's tomb.

CLEOPATRA

Cleopatra, the best known of the few ruling queens of Egypt, was the last pharaoh of the Ptolemaic Dynasty. Her fame derives in no small measure from her role in the demise of the Roman Republic.

Cleopatra was born in 69 BCE, one of six children of Ptolemy XII Auletes (“the flutist”). She may have accompanied her father when he traveled to Rome in 58 BCE to seek help to end an uprising in Alexandria. After his death, she acceded to the throne in 51 BCE as Cleopatra VII to rule jointly with her brother, Ptolemy XIII. Factions in Alexandria fostered antipathy between the siblings. In 48 BCE, when Julius Caesar arrived in Alexandria after defeating Pompey the Great at Pharsalus, he was charmed by her. The ruse she used to gain an initial audience with him in defiance of her brother (a trusted attendant carried her rolled up in a carpet into his presence) is legendary. Their liaison apparently resulted in the birth of Caesarion, Caesar’s only son, in 47 BCE. On the occasion of her visit to Rome (46–44 BCE) with the child and Ptolemy XIV (her coregent after Ptolemy XIII drowned), Caesar commissioned a gold statue of her for the temple of his putative divine ancestress Venus Genetrix. It depicted Cleopatra as the Egyptian goddess Isis, whose incarnation she claimed to be. (When Caesar’s heir Octavian—later Emperor Augustus—emerged victorious over his rivals, he had Caesarion put to death, but left the statue standing in the temple.)

Civil war in Rome followed Caesar’s assassination in 44 BCE, pitting Octavian against Marc Antony, who also fell victim to Cleopatra’s charms. Their twins (a boy and a girl) were joined by another son in 36 BCE. The civil war spread to include Egypt in 32 BCE. After the defeat of the combined fleet of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium in 31 BCE and the suicides of them both in 30 BCE, Egypt became a Roman province.

The only Ptolemaic ruler who spoke Egyptian (as well as other languages), Cleopatra was reputedly very intelligent. The intrigues she survived document wiliness at the very least. Was she beautiful? Egyptian representations of her—for example, reliefs in Hathor’s temple at Dendera—conform to the idealizing norm. The only indisputable portraits of Cleopatra are rather unflattering profiles on coins, which, like all coin portraits, are “less than half a face.”



LAW

the 30-second history

Archaeology has uncovered no ancient Egyptian law code. In theory, all conduct was based on the principle of maat (“righteousness”), although few legal documents mention the word. The king or high officials only involved themselves in critical matters of state, such as the assassination attempt against King Ramesses III or when the royal tombs were being plundered in the late Ramesside Period. Minor cases were handled by a local council of elders, who relied on precedents to settle matters. Contracts and deeds of conveyance were registered in governmental offices, duly witnessed by peers, and could be consulted. A three-century-old case of disputed land ownership was settled when the plaintiffs searched older deeds and proved some were forgeries. Severe penalties, such as cutting off the nose and ears, could be meted out for crimes against the state; for minor offenses, such as theft, the punishment was usually full restitution and reparation of two to three times the value of the goods. During hard times, when people had lost faith in the state, justice was sometimes handled by divine oracles. Questions were asked to the god, in the guise of a statue held aloft by priests, who answered Yes or No, with the statue moving forward or backward for a positive or a negative answer.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Ancient Egyptian law was based on precedents and was mostly administered by local courts consisting of a council of elders.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Wills were drawn up to protect widows. A man who left his belongings to his wife added that she was not to be expelled from the family house after his death, presupposing that such evictions did occur. Another stipulation was that his wife could subsequently bequeath her goods to “whomsoever of her children she chose, whom she bore to me,” implying that her children from a later husband could not inherit the first husband’s goods.

RELATED HISTORIES

PHARAOH

WISDOM

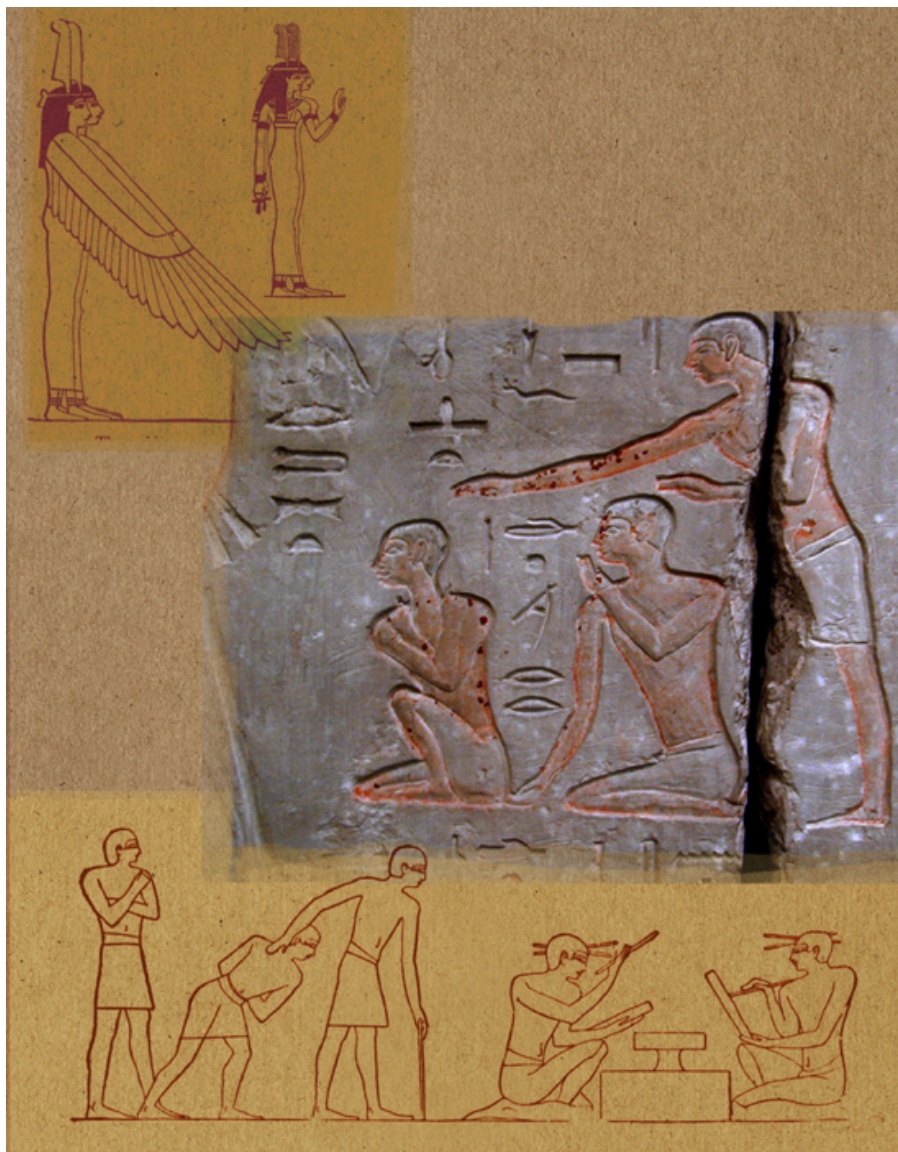
BUREAUCRACY

3-SECOND BIOGRAPHY

ARISTIDE THÉODORIDES

30-SECOND TEXT

Ronald J. Leprohon



Maat was the Egyptian code of righteousness and justice, personified as a goddess. Here, peasants seized for nonpayment of taxes feel the full force of the Egyptian law.

LOVE

the 30-second history

Decorum discouraged especially intimate visual depictions of this quintessentially human emotion. Love—emotional or physical—was instead usually couched in artistic convention or indirect symbolism. In both two and three-dimensional art, even married couples, shown embracing or holding hands, assume poses that seem as rigid as the stone from which they were sculpted. Striking exceptions are Amarna Period scenes of the royal family, showing King Akhenaten, Queen Nefertiti, and their young daughters touching affectionately. There is also the so-called “Erotic Papyrus,” which comically illustrates an array of sexual positions reminiscent of the Kama Sutra. The words “love/to love” were formed on the hieroglyphic sign of the agricultural hoe. One might thus muse that the Egyptians knew that love requires dedicated cultivation to thrive. Whether the objects of romantic or familial love, close intimates were called “brother” or “sister,” irrespective of actual family ties, or more generally just “beloved.” Egyptian poetry captured the gamut of love’s experiences most evocatively, often emphasizing the passionate, spontaneous aspects. Some narrators profess admiration for a lover’s features. Others yearn for rendezvous, anxiously await their beloved’s return home, or lament having to leave a lover’s bed.

3-SECOND SURVEY

Ancient Egyptian expressions of love encompass all the timeless, familiar variations of this emotion: heart-warming and endearing, lustful and consuming, playful and saucy.

3-MINUTE EXCAVATION

Four major collections of ancient Egyptian love poems have survived, three written on papyri and one inscribed on a pottery vessel. All compositions date from the New Kingdom. Most poems are voiced in the first person, which suggests that these “songs,” or “utterances” as the Egyptians called them, were intended to be spoken or sung to musical accompaniment. Interestingly, the word “love” does not appear frequently in these compositions.

RELATED HISTORIES

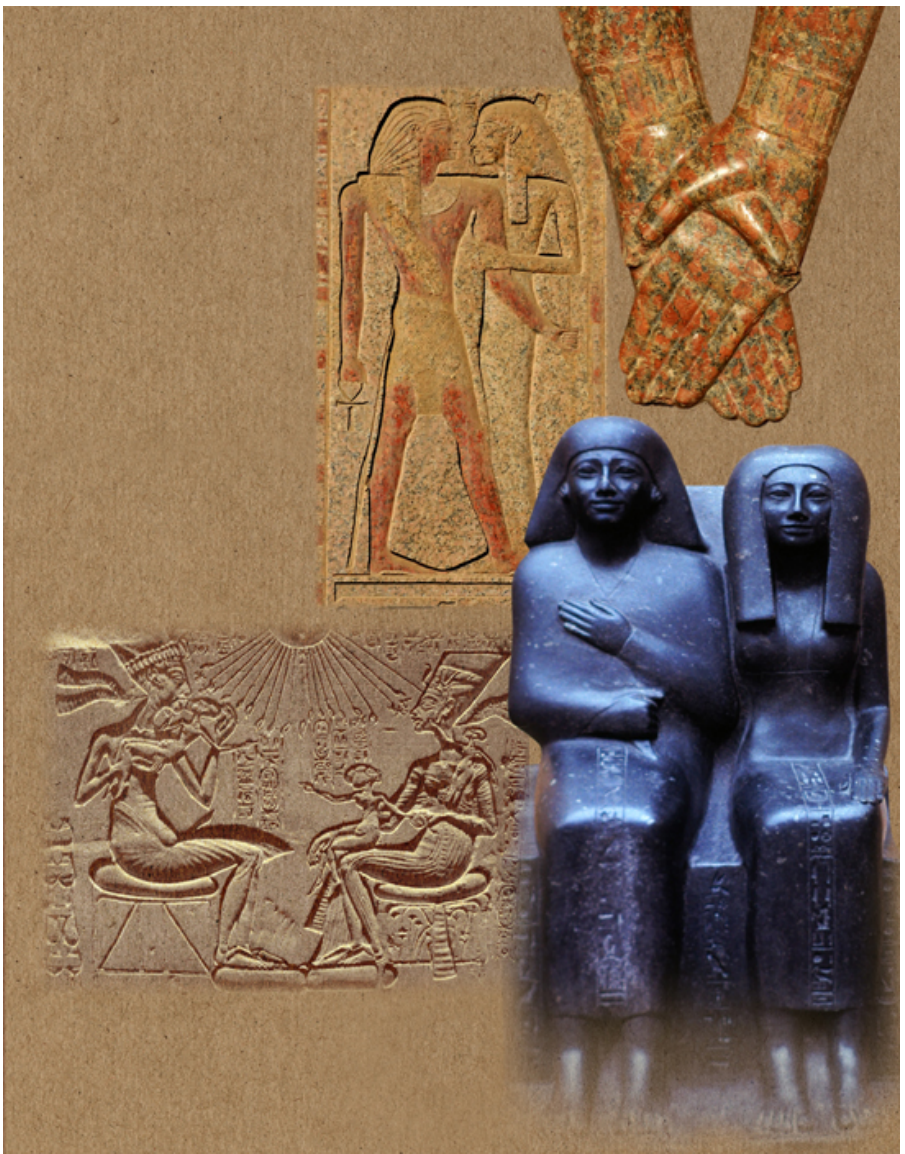
AKHENATEN

CHILDHOOD & FAMILY

GENDER & CAREERS

30-SECOND TEXT

Nicholas Picardo



Most married couples were represented in formal poses, but scenes of Akhenaten and his family display physical affection.

RESOURCES

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Modern interdisciplinary excavations and archaeological field schools at Giza and elsewhere, organized by Ancient Egypt Research Associates.

www.arce.org

American Research Center in Egypt, the primary American organization connected to archaeological work in Egypt.

www.digitalegypt.ucl.ac.uk

The University College, London, web page, with a lot of information on topics such as archaeology, art and architecture, language, religious beliefs, etc.

www.fitzmuseum.cam.ac.uk/er

Cambridge Egyptology Resources, maintained by Nigel Strudwick; a useful site for news and various resources.

www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/tutankhamundiscovery.html

Archive of Howard Carter's records and Harry Burton's photographs taken during the clearance of Tutankhamun's tomb, along with documents related to the three-volume publication about the discovery.

www.gizapyramids.org

Giza archaeological data (photos and documents), primarily from the Harvard University–Boston Museum of Fine Arts Expedition.

giza.3ds.com

Three-dimensional reconstruction of the Giza Plateau and its monuments based on original archaeological data.

www.iae-egyptology.org

The web portal of the International Association of Egyptologists.

www.osirisnet.net

Maintained by Thierry Benderitter and Jon Hirst. Contains descriptions and photographs of many ancient Egyptian tombs.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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his research interests, including ancient Egyptian houses and households, settlements, society, and religion.

Thomas Schneider is Professor of Egyptology and Near Eastern Studies at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver. He studied at Zurich, Basel, and Paris, earning a lizentiat, doctorate, and habilitation in Egyptology at the University of Basel. He was a Visiting Professor at the University of Vienna in 1999 and at the University of Heidelberg from 2003 to 2004. From 2001 to 2005, he was the Research Professor of the Swiss National Science Foundation at the University of Basel, and from 2005 to 2007 he was Professor of Egyptology at the University of Wales, Swansea. He was the visiting Scholar at New York University in 2006 and at the University of California, Berkeley, in 2012. His main areas of research are Egyptian interconnections with the Levant and the Near East, Egyptian history and chronology, and Egyptian historical phonology. His current research project is on the history of Egyptology in Nazi Germany. He is founder and editor-in-chief of the Journal of Egyptian History, as well as editor of Near Eastern Archaeology.

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